The Adventure Gamer's Manual

Bob Redrup

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Dedicated to the memory of
Richard Walker: Angler, journalist, engineer and friend

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Origins

1.1 Welcome

'The Mad Hatter'

Welcome to this book: I've been an adventure game enthusiast for almost as long as I have owned a computer. I've collected various types of computer over the last 10 years – and I'm almost embarrassed to admit that, currently, I possess four different machines!

Consequently, this book is a generic one; we shall look at adventure games, the different types of puzzles the authors can try to fox us with, how to overcome them, and the sort of thing that lies behind an adventure writer's mind as the puzzles are worked out.

We shall also be looking at some essentials that will get the novice started on his or her explorations with maximum effectiveness.

There's nothing more frustrating than trying to get going in an adventure, only to find that you are bumped off unceremoniously within a couple of moves. Some adventure game writers are pretty sadistic types.

If you own one of the more popular types of home computer, you'll probably find examples drawn from adventures that you have already bought, or which certainly are readily available for your machine. I've included a list of recommended adventures in Chapter 12.

Computers that will certainly be covered include the following: IBM PCs and compatibles, the various Sinclair Spectrum models, the Commodore 64 and Amiga, the Atari ST, the various Acorn computers (Electron, BBC B and Master, the Archimedes and A3000) and owners of the different Amstrad computers will also find useful material here. So, one way and another, most people should find help within the pages of this book.

The example puzzles that I shall deal with are ones that I have scratched my head long and hard over before solving them; which is probably one reason why I am bald. So what you will be getting in this book is the results of personal experience, together with the fruit of correspondence with some other very experienced adventurers, and even some thoughts gained by picking the brains of the adventure writers themselves.

What you won't be getting, however, is a series of complete solutions to adventure games: where I use material from an adventure game to illustrate a problem, it will only be from a small part of that game. My aim is to teach you how to solve problems for yourself, not to make you rely on someone else for a solution. We all need help from time to time – and that includes me – but none of us needs or deserves to be spoon fed.

One thing I've noticed, over the years I've been involved with the adventure game scene, is how wide a variety of people are hooked on this fascinating pastime: I've been in contact with undergraduates and university lecturers, business men and women, just about all ranks in the different branches of the armed services, boys and girls at school, and people from literally every continent of the world. Adventure gaming seems to cross almost every frontier you can think of.

Just before we get going seriously, it's worth recalling how this situation came into being, seen from my own position as a home computer enthusiast living in the United Kingdom. Inevitably, some of this will be from my own perspective; but then it will help you see how I arrived on the adventure scene.

1.2 History and development of adventures in the U.K.

In the beginning was **Colossal Cave**. This was the legendary mainframe adventure written in Fortran by Crowther and Woods. At the time, it was one of the largest programs ever written; and yet now we take for granted the fact that versions of this – the very first adventure game – and even larger ones, will fit easily into a desktop computer.

Colossal Cave provided the launching pad for all subsequent adventure games; and so we owe Crowther and Woods a tremendous debt of thanks for the way they have provided so many people with a consuming passion, and a few software houses with tremendous popularity amongst adventure game fans.

It is fascinating to trace the development of adventures over the past 10 years or so. My own involvement came fairly early on when, like thousands of others in the UK, I bought a Sinclair ZX81. When the 16k additional RAM became available, it meant that quite a number of books were produced containing type-it-yourself programs.

One of the books I obtained had a simple adventure in it: this adventure contained about 10 locations and a couple of simple puzzles; and yet – once the program had been typed in – I was totally hooked. My (then) young son and I were absolutely fascinated as we began to solve the puzzles, and we were thrilled when we managed to finish it. It really was exciting stuff, and the fact that it was a simple adventure and so only took about an hour to solve didn't make the excitement any the less.

Once I had replaced the ZX81 with a Sinclair Spectrum I began to hunt out adventure games seriously, and it was not long before they began appearing on the market in decent numbers. I snapped up as many as I could afford. By today's standards these games were simple, crude even; they had short location descriptions, and a crude parser that allowed only the most basic two-word input by the player. Nevertheless, I found them enthralling and, so it would seem, did thousands of others.

As far as British home computers are concerned, the next machine to capture something of a mass market was the computer from Acorn, the BBC Microcomputer. This had less memory than the Spectrum but a far better keyboard, and it also had various possibilities for expansion, particularly that of adding floppy disk drives – even though initially these were horrendously expensive. I seem to remember a price of about £800 being asked for twin drives at first.

Two things happened more or less simultaneously at this time (the mid 1980s); some adventure writers managed to create advanced compression techniques which

ACORNSOFT GAMES

DISC

Countdown
to Doom
for the BBC Microcomputer Model B

enabled large games to be squeezed into a relatively small memory by today's standards. Others used disk access techniques so as to transcend the memory limitations of the BBC Microcomputer and its later, smaller brother, the Acorn Electron.

It was about this time that a number of names began to catch the attention of the discerning adventure gaming public in the United Kingdom. The Austin brothers, Pete and Mike, formed the Level9 software house which rapidly developed into a family affair, and they soon turned from writing utilities to creating a steady stream of text adventures that helped set new standards of excellence.

At the same time, from the Acornsoft stable, came such names as Peter Killworth, Jonathan Partington and Jon Thackray. These talented programmers were responsible for such diverse entertainments as **Philosopher's Quest, Castle of Riddles, Countdown to Doom** and the mind-boggling **Acheton**. A little later Robert and Mike O'Leary became known as the inventive talent behind the Robico badged adventures which helped raise standards even higher.

Sophistication grew, and longer location descriptions became commonplace – thanks to the formidable compression techniques that were now commonplace – and the atmosphere of adventure games became even more advanced. By 1988 pure text adventure writing had reached its heyday. Quite complex instructions could now be entered by the adventure gamer; the command WAIT began to assume importance in those games where a move counter operated, and the timing of moves became critical to success in some adventures. Perhaps even more important were those adventures which offered on-line help facilities to the frustrated player – who then didn't have to wait ages for postal advice from the software house or even overworked adventure column writers!

Finally, the possibility of resurrection became readily available – a blunder need no longer be fatal, even if the resurrection process was accompanied by a screen full of withering scorn. This was to be (to some extent) superseded by a variety of commands which enabled the player retreat one move if they somehow blundered into a fatal situation.

Another feature which emerged in mid-decade was the arrival on the market of a number of adventure writing utilities. These enabled people with gifted imaginations but little or no programming ability to have a go at adventure writing themselves.

Utilities such as The Quill, ALPS, Graphic Adventure Creator and STAC were seen as a boon by many would-be adventure writers – and thus people like Geoff Larsen made a name for themselves as producers of modestly sized and priced, but very well-written, adventures for such machines as the Acorn Electron.

This was the time of the home computer boom in the United Kingdom, and various manufacturers produced machines which they hoped would find a secure niche in the market. Inevitably, not all of them did; but the successful firms gave us computers with increasingly larger memories, such as the Commodore 64. This meant that tight compression was gradually becoming less and less necessary.

Towards the end of the 1980s there was a steady flow of more sophisticated computers; the various Amstrad machines, the Atari ST, the Amiga, the Acorn Archimedes and PCs that were cheap enough for the home enthusiast all saw the light of day. And as their software base increased, some very sophisticated adventures indeed began to come on to the market.

These machines, with their memories of up to a megabyte as standard, and greatly enhanced graphic capabilities, meant that the text-only adventure was rapidly becoming a thing of the past, even though some purists like me mourned the fact. They felt much the same way as the little girl who preferred radio to television, because she thought the pictures were better. I sympathise with this attitude myself on the grounds that the human imagination, when it is triggered off by some good descriptions, can hardly be bettered.

1.3 Types of adventure game

1.3.1 Pure text adventures

It means, therefore, that there are a number of different types of adventure available today. There still are good pure text adventures to be found, and these are packed with purple prose. It's of some interest, I think, to know that a firm like Level9 employed the services of an specialist in English to assist with the text of their later adventure games. This was just to make sure that the descriptions were always of the highest possible quality, even though by this time, graphics were an integral part of their games.

1.3.2 Illustrated adventures

After the pure text adventure came what I call Illustrated Adventures. The first one of these that I ever saw was for the BBC Microcomputer – Twin Kingdom Valley. This was something of a landmark in its day. Each location was given its own illustration; and, even though quite a number of them in fact had the same illustration, this was quite cleverly disguised. It also had a helpful mapping aid: on the first visit, a location could be described at length. But on subsequent visits the description could be much shorter. This was a great help to anyone whose mapping technique was a bit on the sloppy side.

These illustrated adventures still had – and have – plenty of good text to accompany them, and typical examples of these are the Magnetic Scrolls adventures such as **Corruption**, and **Fish!** or the Level9 series featuring that incomparable female Ingrid. Recently, the adventure based on Alice's adventures in **Wonderland** was released for a number of different computers, and it is something of a classic in the way that elegant text and superb graphics go hand in hand. This type of adventure has, perhaps, just reached its peak.

1.3.3 Graphic adventures

Illustrated adventures were rapidly followed by Graphic Adventures: these are games which take advantage of the WIMP (Windows, Icons, Mouse, Pointer) environment which became available for an increasingly wide variety of home computers during the late 1980s. Meant as an aid to business users who were intimidated by computers, this user-friendly device was rapidly exploited for adventures and other games.

Text became less important to this type of adventure, and as an alternative in many cases, animation was introduced. In these games a basic set of commands can be accessed by the mouse, while the puzzles themselves are an integral part of the graphics. Items can often be manipulated via the mouse, and so accurate observation is always essential.

Thus, when creating this style of adventure, purple prose became less vital than the correct shade of purple for the sunset – thanks to the memory now available. Even so, games of this type began to be supplied on not just one, but up to five or six different disks. Disk-swapping became an accepted chore as part of solving these adventures, and we soon learnt that the command to insert a particular disk meant that a fate either worse than – or at least as bad as – death awaited us. Sierra On Line is the software house I personally associate with this particular development.

1.3.4 Arcade adventures

While all this was going on, arcade games were also getting more sophisticated. Much of this development was due to the fact that not everyone wished to blast everything that moved on their screen, even if blasting things did help to reduce their frustration and fury after a hard day's work or school.

Arcade games were developed that began to incorporate puzzles very much akin to those posed by the early text-only adventure writers. This was particularly the case so far as chaining puzzles were concerned. As their name suggests these are intricate series of interlinked puzzles leading to a grand

conclusion which is dependent on solving, in sequence, each of the previous tests. It was not long before the Arcade Adventure became very much a genre in its own right.

1.4 Adventure game spin-offs

1.4.1 Role playing games

Two further developments were spawned by the adventure game. And for many adventure game players they provide a very interesting sideline: I know that my own stock of games programs includes both. I mean, of course, Role Playing Games and Strategy Games.

There can be little doubt that the computer-based Role Playing Game has its origins in the ideas behind the board games of the Dungeons & Dragons type. This particular branch of adventuring is quite distinct from the Arcade Adventure, particularly in the way it demands very meticulous mapping; it also employs the strong fantasy element which can be a feature of adventure games proper. In the United Kingdom, the game **Dungeon Master** has become something of a classic.

1.4.2 Strategy games

Strategy Games have also acquired a strong following, and again they attract people who are willing to face the question: "What would happen if..." when applied to certain historical events that are perceived as influencing the way we now find ourselves. So, crucial battles are looked at: What would happen to European history if Napoleon had stayed victorious; if Nazi Germany had conquered the United Kingdom; if the United States had remained isolationist during the first – or second – world wars? The questions – and scenarios – are endless.

These are topics that arouse interest not just in professional historians, but they inevitably stir the curiosity of anybody who has an intelligent interest in current affairs – and once again, adventurers qualify! Sometimes it's a question of genuine history, and we can take a second look at the battle of **Borodino**; sometimes it's a matter of myth, and we can oversee the **War in Middle Earth** and attempt to emulate the Fellowship of the Ring in bringing the evil Sauron to his downfall.

1.5 Mainstream adventures

You can see the way the tree of adventure game types has branched out and assumed mighty proportions from the relatively simple beginnings of

Colossal Cave. I'm going to concentrate on the main stem – what I can only call the adventure game proper – in its three main forms. What follows will deal with text-only games, Illustrated Adventures and – to some extent – Graphic Adventures. That's a rich enough field in itself; some other enthusiast will have to deal with Role Playing and Strategy Games – how about you?

1.5.1 Examples of themes

Mainstream adventures (if I may call them that) contain a tremendous diversity of themes; and this is very important, because it helps those of us who enjoy particular types of literature to pick and choose. While we are in confession mode, I may as well admit that I am strongly attracted to History, Science Fiction (the hard-science stuff) and Fantasy of the Tolkeinesque variety. That makes me a sucker for just about every adventure game written.

It means that I have enjoyed – and still enjoy replaying – such diverse offerings as the Tolkein-style **Jewels of Darkness** by Level9 or the **Zork Trilogy** from Infocom. I also take delight in various space sagas such as the **Doom Trilogy** from Topologika, or **Enthar Seven** (Robico) and **Snowball** (Level9).

I also have hugged myself in delight at such offerings as the detective/secret agent adventures typified by **Corruption** (Magnetic Scrolls/Official Secrets), **Cops** (Summit Software) or the **Rick Hanson Trilogy** (Robico). And I've also been entertained by some of the following games where books have formed the basis of the adventure.

Erik the Viking will only be available to owners of the elderly BBC Micro who can still load tape adventures, but it was boosted by a film release in 1989 and the original book was great fun. Contrast that with **Not a Penny More Not a Penny Less**: the book was – to my mind – absolutely brilliant, but on the whole the computer game received poor reviews.

Then we know about such classics as **The Hobbit** and **The Lord of the Rings**. These games were, largely because of their size and complexity, prone to minor bugs; but they still afforded entertainment that was well worth pursuing. And time would tell to pass on information about such other games as the **Ingrid** (lovable-disaster-creating female gnome) series from Level9, or the highly entertaining (and slightly salacious) **Leisure Suit Larry** series. What I can say is that we are about to have a lot of fun together, and – I hope – you'll learn how to kick those pesky puzzle makers in the teeth!

So, let's move on to getting started when you are a total novice adventurer, and you have just loaded up your first game.

2

Getting Started

2.1 Reading the documentation

The postman has delivered the goods, you've an hour to spare, and your trembling fingers tear away impatiently at the wrapping containing the new adventure game that you've been longing for. The briefest glance at the instructions tells you the loading procedure and, moments later, you are staring at the opening scene willing it to disgorge its secrets.

You enter various hasty direction commands and, in a little while, you read: *You are lost in a field of maize, everywhere looks the same.* You bash on, entering direction commands at random - and the same forbidding message comes on screen time after time. Resisting the impulse to smash the monitor to smithereens, you sit down and do what you ought to have done in the first place: you read the instruction booklet. I guess we've all done something like that in our early days as adventurers.

It's the old, old business of more haste, less speed. Here's what I try to do every time I am about to start a new adventure. First, I read every word of the documentation. The reason for this is that, nearly always, clues are discreetly planted in the text of any introduction to an adventure. Whenever I am asked to write a review of an adventure game I always plant similar clues into the things I have to say - and I expect people to read my reviews very carefully with this in mind: it's not so much the deathless prose as the death-less possibilities which are on offer. If only people will look for the hidden hints, they will nearly always save themselves from dying somewhere along the line.

2.2 Studying the initial description

Once I've read the introduction, I load the game; and I then spend some time
going carefully through the description of the opening location: there's nearly
always a wealth of information to be found here - and I'm going to give a
number of examples in a moment so that you can see what I mean.

2.3 Checking your status

Your next task is to check your own status - rather in the way that your
computer checks itself when you first switch it on. The computer is a bit more
complicated, but the similarity between its own status check on power-up and
what the adventurer needs to do is very close. Usually checking your own
status involves entering the command **Inventory, Inv** or even just **I**. You will
then get a report on what you are carrying and, just possibly, what you are
wearing.

Sometimes you turn out to be wearing and carrying absolutely nothing; if
that's so your first task is probably to get some clothes before venturing
outside. If you don't, your chances of being arrested and thrown in jail for
indecent exposure are quite high.

2.4 Checking the exits

Next, examine the available exits. It's always possible that, before you can see
them, you will need to type in a command - possibly **Exits On**. If the
description of the location includes the words: *visible exits are...* it might mean
that, somewhere in the adventure, Invisible exits will be found - if you can
work out how to see them, that is.

One favourite trick of the nastier-minded adventure writers is to place an
exceedingly attractive exit as an immediate option - and you'd be surprised
how often it can lead to your painful extinction. It turns out to be a one-way
chute to a fiery furnace or something equally pleasant. Still, it's better to find
out quickly.

2.5 Equipment

2.5.1 Clues from equipment
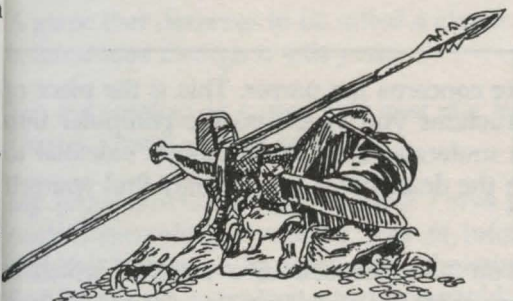
Various 'items'

Your next job is to examine most carefully, any items that happen to be lurking around. On very rare occasions, some of these will turn out to be red herrings, but you'll normally see things that are going to be of some use during the game. Knives, daggers and other weapons suggest that, from time to time, the environment will be hostile; bottles of water, spades and the like suggest that you may get thirsty, or need to water a plant, and that gardening or even excavating might be called for at some point in the adventure.

2.5.2 Testing equipment

Another procedure to go through before getting started properly is that of testing equipment. Sometimes you can learn something that will prove very useful later on. If there is, for example, an item that may have magical properties located at the start, it can be worthwhile trying various actions. Anything described as a rod, a wand, a staff or even a stick should be subjected to the command **Wave** (object).

The chances are that nothing will happen immediately – though it may – but you may well be told that the object reacts in some way. It may give off a sound, emit light or something similar. Even if all you are told is: *Nothing seems to happen* you can be fairly sure that something WILL happen at some point in the adventure. Similar actions should be tried if you come across anything that could be a talisman of some kind – it may be described as a medallion, a locket or something similar. Try wearing it, too; and try rubbing it, for that matter.

2.5.3. Fragility and usability

The other tests that should be made before starting off on your adventures concern fragility and usability. Basically, you should try to do everything you can think of to each object; particularly see what happens if you **Drop** it.

Some things turn out to be quite fragile, and you may need to test out
alternative command before such things as eggs or Ming vases can
deposited safely - either that or you may need to find a cushion or sor
similar soft landing place before you can part company with it again.

2.6 The parser

A word of advice for beginners here concerns the parser. This is the piece
software which translates the instructions you type into the computer in
something the adventure program understands. It is absolutely essential
type a word exactly as you see it in the description, or you may find yours
very frustrated.

Let me give a simple example. You find yourself in a location which
described as follows: *This is a gloomy cellar full of cobwebs and the odd bottle
old wine. In a corner you can just make out a trap-door.*

If you then enter the instruction **Open Trapdoor** or **Open Trap Door** you w
almost certainly be told that the computer doesn't understand you. T
problem is that you have omitted the hyphen between the words *Trap* a
Door; as a result the program will not recognise the word. You'd be surpris
how often I still get caught out by this kind of thing, just because certa
conventions in written English are very much a matter of choice.

So, the lesson here is: *check the spelling of anything in the text* very carefully a
then reproduce it accurately when typing in a command. If the program th
refuses to understand you it most probably means that the item you we
trying to manipulate was just part of the scenery. The better programs w
even tell you just that.

2.7 Better saved than sorry

Once you are some way into the adventure, it will be sensible to **Save** yo
status before testing out actions on various objects. It's not so important at t
very beginning, but later on this simple precaution may well keep you from
lot of grief. I'll come back to this point later on.

2.7.1 Potentially dangerous actions

Some objects only reveal their true properties when you try to **Throw** them
curved stick may turn out to be a boomerang, an egg may reveal itself as
hand-grenade in disguise. There's just no way of telling until you try. On
when you've tried all of these varied actions on everything around you is
time to think of moving. So let's take a look at some opening descriptions
adventure games.

2.8 Examples of opening moves

2.8.1 Zork 1

A game that deserves to be called a classic is **Zork 1** by Infocom. The opening is innocuous enough it tells you:

You are standing in a open field west of a white house, with a boarded front door. There is a small mailbox here.

My initial reactions were twofold: I was pretty sure that the mailbox would contain something useful by way of information, and I was also convinced that there ought to be some way of getting into the house. Nevertheless, my first input was **Inventory** - and I was told: *You are empty-handed.*

Next move was **Get Mailbox** - and I was told: *It is securely anchored.* So I tried **Open Mailbox** and was rewarded with: *Opening the small mailbox reveals a leaflet.* **Get Leaflet** and **Read Leaflet** followed and the message read: *WELCOME TO ZORK! ZORK is a game of adventure, danger, and low cunning. In it you will explore some of the most amazing territory ever seen by mortals. NO computer should be without one!*

Apart from the advertising enthusiasm, I was given some important information - I might get injured or even killed in this adventure. Now it was time to see if I could actually get into the house - I had to case the joint, so to speak.

Since I was west of the house, I tried typing **East**, only to be told: *The door is boarded, and you can't remove the boards.* Nothing daunted, I entered **NE** (as an abbreviation for **Northeast**) and made a little progress.

This time the message read: *You are facing the north side of a white house. There is no door here, and all the windows are boarded up. To the north a narrow path winds through the trees.*

I wasn't interested in paths leading north at this stage, I just wanted to get into that house if at all possible so I entered the command **East** - and struck pay dirt.

The screen had the words: *You are behind the white house. A path leads into the forest to the east. In one corner of the house there is a small window which is slightly ajar.* **Open Window** brought the response: *With great effort you open the window far enough to allow entry.* The next command, therefore, was **In**.

Now we were beginning to get somewhere; the legend read: *You are in t*
kitchen of the white house. A table seems to have been used recently for t
preparation of food. A passage leads to the west and a dark staircase can be se
leading upward. A dark chimney leads down and to the east is a small window whi
is open. On the table is an elongated brown sack smelling of hot peppers. A bottle
sitting on the table. The glass bottle contains: A quantity of water.

There was a veritable mine of information here: several places to visit an
some goodies to collect. The way the bottle of water was described made
clear that the adventure would also expect other liquids to be carried in th
bottle - oil, perhaps for rusty locks or door hinges.

Anyway, first things first; **Examine Sack** elicited the message: *The sack*
closed. So I opened it and was told that it contained a lunch and a clove
garlic. So, someone (maybe me) would be hungry at some point in the gam
and garlic, apart from being an essential in much decent cookery, is also
well known protection against vampires and other noxious nasties.

I took the bottle and sack - and tried putting the bottle into the sack as a w
of being able to carry more things - but I was told there was no room. Still,
had been worth a try.

Now I had to decide where to go next - I figured that I might need a ligh
source before going upstairs, and the same thing seemed true of the dar
chimney leading downwards; so really there was only one option left - **West**

I was told: *You are in the living room. There is a doorway to the east, a wooden do*
with strange Gothic lettering to the west, which appears to be nailed shut, a troph
case, and a large oriental rug in the centre of the room. Above the trophy case hang
an elvish sword of great antiquity. A battery-powered brass lantern is on the troph
case.

There was a awful lot to be learned here. The trophy case looked like
possible storage place for any treasures collected during the course of m
adventuring, specially since it was empty. There was my light sourc
awaiting use but, I realised, I would have to be sparing in its use so as not t
drain the battery - though a replacement might be obtainable somewhere els
in the adventure. Also, a lovely elvish sword for battering baddies wit
beckoned - and the chances were that it would warn of impending dange
elvish swords are like that.

I took the sword and lantern, and then tried **Pull Carpet** on the grounds tha
you never know what may be underneath - lots of dirt gets swept unde
carpets, and some of it can be pay dirt. That move was well worth the troubl
since the message then read: *With a great effort, the rug is moved to one side*
the room, revealing the dusty cover of a closed trap door.

I resisted the temptation to dive down immediately; instead I decided to explore the rest of the house and so I went back east into the kitchen and then Up the stairs. I was told: *You have moved into a dark place. It is pitch black. You are likely to be eaten by a grue.*

I hadn't a clue what a grue was, but the message told me plainly that moving in the dark in this adventure was likely to prove gruesome, if not fatal. In some games you can move around in the dark at will - but not in **Zork 1** it would appear. So: **Light Lamp.**

The following message appeared: *This is the attic. The only exit is a stairway leading down. A large coil of rope is lying in the corner. On a table is a nasty-looking knife.*

A coil of rope would be of help in climbing down (and back up) cliffs and reaching otherwise inaccessible places; it possibly could be used to tie two short planks together so as to make it possible to cross a stream or chasm; it might even be useful for trussing up any villains encountered during my travels. Similarly, nasty-looking knives are always useful in a tight corner - or possibly even might be used for cutting ropes at some later date - so I took them both.

I want to deal with the opening moves of other adventures beside **Zork 1,** so we'll leave things here. A word of warning, though, to anyone who may buy the game and then follow me through these moves: don't forget there's still the outside to explore before leaping down that trapdoor. In adventuring, patience pays off.

Let's turn now to a very different adventure which, although it is still a text-only game, has quite a different style and flavour to **Zork 1.**

2.8.2 Philosopher's Quest

Philosopher's Quest was one of the early tape-based adventures written for the BBC Microcomputer by Peter Killworth. In 1987 or thereabouts he revised it quite extensively, and it became available for a much wider series of computers - and on disk, naturally - when the software house Topologika took over the marketing and distribution of a number of adventures originally produced under the Acornsoft label.

I was originally attracted to **Philosopher's** Quest for the simple reason that I happen to

have a combined honours degree in Philosophy and History! Philosophy wa
fun in my student days (it still is, when I can spare the time) and so
reckoned that anything by way of an adventure game that had Philosopher':
as part of the title ought to be fun, too. I wasn't wrong.

When you first load **Philosopher's Quest,** you get a great deal of helpfu
background information which tells you some of the things you can expect t
cope with. Here is how it starts.

Magic wands can be dangerous things.

The one you find in the junk shop off Market Street is no exception. It's a mistake t
wave it while the old shopkeeper's back is turned...

Instantly the atmosphere turns inside out, taking you with it. Then it twists bac
again, dumping you back inside the shop - but a strangely altered shop indeed...N
windows, precious little stock - and no shopkeeper, either. You're in part of a cav
system, to judge from the walls, ceiling and floor.

As you pause, uncertain what to do, a voice seems to weasel through the back of you
skull:

"Go and seek the treasure, mortal, and bring it back here in payment for the misus
of my wand. You will need every ounce of cunning to deal with the serpent in th
Garden of Eden, the ancient mariner, the invalid old lady, the whale, and othe
problems too difficult to name...A word of warning - it is dangerous to travel in th
dark! One last thing - READ MY NOTICE!"

The casual approach to adventuring will lead to players ignoring an awful lo
of helpful clues and information packed into this introductory text. It's tha
bit more flowing than the **Zork 1** text - and indicates that it is of a rather late
vintage.

Look at what is mentioned: the Garden of Eden, an ancient mariner, an ol
lady, a whale - and other things just hinted at. To me, the Garden of Ede
suggests one of two things: either forbidden fruit, or else lies; the serpent ir
the Book of Genesis lied in whatever passed for his teeth. The reference to ar
ancient mariner suggested a poem by one Samuel Taylor Coleridge entitlec
The Ryme of the Ancient Mariner which (as I seem to recollect) ha
something to do with albatrosses, as well as water, water everywhere, and no
a drop to drink. I wasn't so sure about the old lady...except that I felt sh
would want a lot of satisfying one way or another.

Finally, the reference to the whale suggested that - as so many have done
the biblical book of Jonah was being slightly misinterpreted. A giant fish
(rather than a whale) is recorded as having swallowed Jonah: however, I wa
pretty sure I'd encounter some aquatic, and maybe digestive, adventure
somewhere along the line.

My next job was to trigger the opening scene - and this is what I saw: *You are standing in a small shop which normally has various goods displayed for sale. Areas of the shop are obviously intended for the display of treasure. Above an exit south hangs a large sign, which reads:- Adventurers please note only two implements may be removed from this shop under penalty of death. So choose carefully.*

Those readers who happen to own an original (tape) version of **Philosopher's Quest** will by now have realised that there are already some changes to their opening scenario. The serpent is definitely a parvenu, rather than old money. There are further changes to come. Peter revised with relish - and puzzles proliferate; I guess it has something to do with the desire to update games and provide even better value for money.

The list of items available in the shop has changed from that originally given in the tape version, too. Here's how it reads:

A piece of sausage is curled up here.

There is a fluffy lace-edged cushion here.

There is a small teabag here.

There is an aqualung with a full tank of oxygen here. It turns on automatically upon contact with water.

There is a bunch of keys here.

Now I'm going to confess a couple of things: I haven't yet had time to complete the revised and different version of Philosopher's Quest; and - secondly - I'm not sure it matters. You'll get the fruits of what I had to do from the very beginning while you understand that I've not yet reached the very end, even though I believe I'm well on the way. That's the trouble with trying to solve a couple of dozen adventures simultaneously.

Adventure games - and this is not confined to text-only offerings - can (unlike Julius Caesar's Gaul) be divided into two, rather than three, parts. There are those games which pose a problem very quickly, and those adventures which allow you to roam around almost at random before puzzles become a priority. **Zork 1** lets the adventure game player roam almost at will for about 30 locations before puzzles become a problem.

Philosopher's Quest isn't quite so kind. It looks as though only two items can be removed from the shop - in which case, what on earth shall we carry? The cushion could be invaluable if fragile Ming Vases need to be dropped; teabags and old ladies seem to go together; aqualungs and whales would appear to be inseparable; keys can do an awful lot of opening doors - and we haven't even thought of that piece of sausage curled quietly up in a corner.

This is what I did, anyway - and you can always write and tell me I was da
I took the teabag on account of the old lady; I took the aqualung on accou
of the alleged whale and the medium it preferred. Finally, I took the key
Okay, Okay, I know what the man said: two items only, but I'm also bra
(and working on prior knowledge). It seems to me that keys and adventur
are inseparable - and maybe someone is going to show me that I got it wror
where the revised Philosopher's Quest is concerned.

Two items can be carried south through the shop door, but nobody said th
nothing could be thrown, so my first entry was **Throw Keys.** I have to confe
that, when I first encountered the adventure, this was only a try-on, but
worked. The keys landed outside the shop and produced a very disgruntle
message. A thunderous voice told me that I wouldn't get away with that pl
again.

Next comes a piece of the adventure where Peter Killworth and I (ve
amicably) part company. I'm just not sure about the ethics of the next puzzl
Philosopher's Quest is one of the adventures where puzzles pose problen
almost from the word go. Follow the thrown keys south, and you are land
in stygian darkness. We know that moving in the dark will most probab
prove fatal - so what do we do?

Before I explain things fully, it's worth remembering that the current versic
of **Philosopher's Quest** offers on-line help. You aren't going to get as bad
stuck as you might think. In all the adventures marketed by Topologika tl
command **Help** provides just that!

Anyhow, back to the problem: there was no light source whatever mention
in the early location descriptions, and so there was nothing we could pick t
and carry around with us - and yet we were warned that movement in tl
dark could prove fatal. So, I moved south into darkness.

The command I tried next was **Get Lamp** - only it didn't work, because
couldn't see a lamp (that's what the program told me). Entering the He
command fed me clues that - with sincere insistence that the game was fai
showed how the command **Get All** did what was needful. I still don't kno
quite how fair that ploy was, even though the game disk provided tl
solution for desperate adventurers.

Apart from acquiring the lamp - which I was then able to switch on easily
also retrieved the keys and obtained an oilskin which presumably wou
have some sort of use later on in the game. One move south in the no
lighted tunnel took me to a location where I found a ruby amulet. I help
myself to it and scored one point; however, by returning to the shop ar
dropping it there, I boosted my score to 14 points. This, as much as anythin
shows the value of putting treasures obtained during an adventure into tl
right storage area.

2.8.3 Snowball

Snowball was the first part of Level 9's science fiction trilogy called Silicon Dreams, and was also the first adventure I ever came across where the chief protagonist was female.

Kim Kimberley, secret agent, was a tall fair haired, brown eyed, athletic young lady of variable age (it depends what you want to do with the time dilation factor that occurs once you approach a reasonable fraction of the speed of light) who was not quite bright enough for Cambridge, and so had to settle for Oxford as second best.

Before continuing, I would remind readers who are Oxford graduates that the background detail here is entirely the responsibility of Pete Austin, and therefore any hemlock should be sent to him and not to me.

Eventually, Kim was recruited as someone who could emerge and take over if anything went wrong with the starship Snowball during its voyage to the Eridani star system and the planet Eden. This is the background scenario to Snowball and, of course, something does go wrong; and the adventure starts with Kim being wakened by her specially modified freezer-coffin. Weakened and disorientated though you are, as Kim, the fate of two million passengers is in your hands.

Remember that Snowball first appeared in 1983, and that we are therefore studying something of an antique!

The first information was simple:

It is dark, you cannot see. What now?

In such cases, my own preferred course of action is that of masterly inactivity: it's a question of waiting to see what will happen since, quite clearly, no sane adventure writer is going to leave the player in such a totally helpless situation. At the same time, if you are in a freezer-coffin with the lid closed, you aren't going to be able to see an awful lot are you? In this sense, the game was being perfectly authentic. I therefore entered the command: Stand.

I was now told:

You notice a lever beside you.

Well, there we were; no red-blooded adventurer can resist the pull of something like a lever, can they? I duly pulled the lever.

The message read:

The lid above rises and a light comes on.. You are in a sponge-lined coffin. The on
visible exit is out.

On moving out, I was told:

The coffin slides away. You are in a blue mortuary beside a smooth ceramic sla
Lights twinkle beside a trapdoor in the ceiling. Exits lead north, up and down.

Purely on the basis of trying the first one mentioned, I moved north an
received the following information:

You are at the entrance to a blue mortuary beside indicator lights and a control pan
Exits lead north (through a door) and south.

Now it was far too early in the proceedings to even think of going o
through that door. Instead, a little bit of cogitation seemed in order. Firs
why was the mortuary given a colour? I decided it probably had to do with
way of identifying that particular mortuary and that I should keep an ey
open for colours that might prove significant.

Second, it was time to take a closer look at the indicator lights: did they hav
any significance? I tried in input Examine lights and was informed:

The indicator lights are red black white black black black. The panel has 10 button
black, brown, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, grey and white.

I reckoned that there was some kind of identification code or combinatio
here and that it was time to experiment. Because I was so early into th
adventure, I didn't save my position at this stage; instead, I started tryin
things straight away – having first noted the sequence of colours given.

My first experiment was to press the buttons in the same order as that show
on the indicator lights. A coffin emerged (you will remember that the one
climbed out of slid away somewhere) and I decided it was probably mine.
pressed other combinations of buttons, and again coffins dutifully emerge
so I left things there. Soon afterwards, a clanking sound began to occupy m
attention, and shortly after that I was confronted by a robotic creature called
nightingale: nightingales are lethal was my next discovery.

Nothing daunted, I plunged back into the fray, retraced my steps and – aft
a little experimentation – discovered that, by climbing onto a coffin, I coul
reach the trapdoor in the ceiling and go through it. I emerged into anoth
blue mortuary and confess that I was a little disappointed at that fac
however, I was delighted to discover that the indicator lights by the door no

featured a different colour code. I had learned something. Pressing this new sequence also produced a coffin.

Uttering the cry **Excelsior!** I pushed upward and onward to the third level. While I was doing that the mechanical clanking came, paused and went away again. I had – by pure chance – discovered how to avoid those deadly nightingales. It was time to go back and explore outside the mortuary precincts.
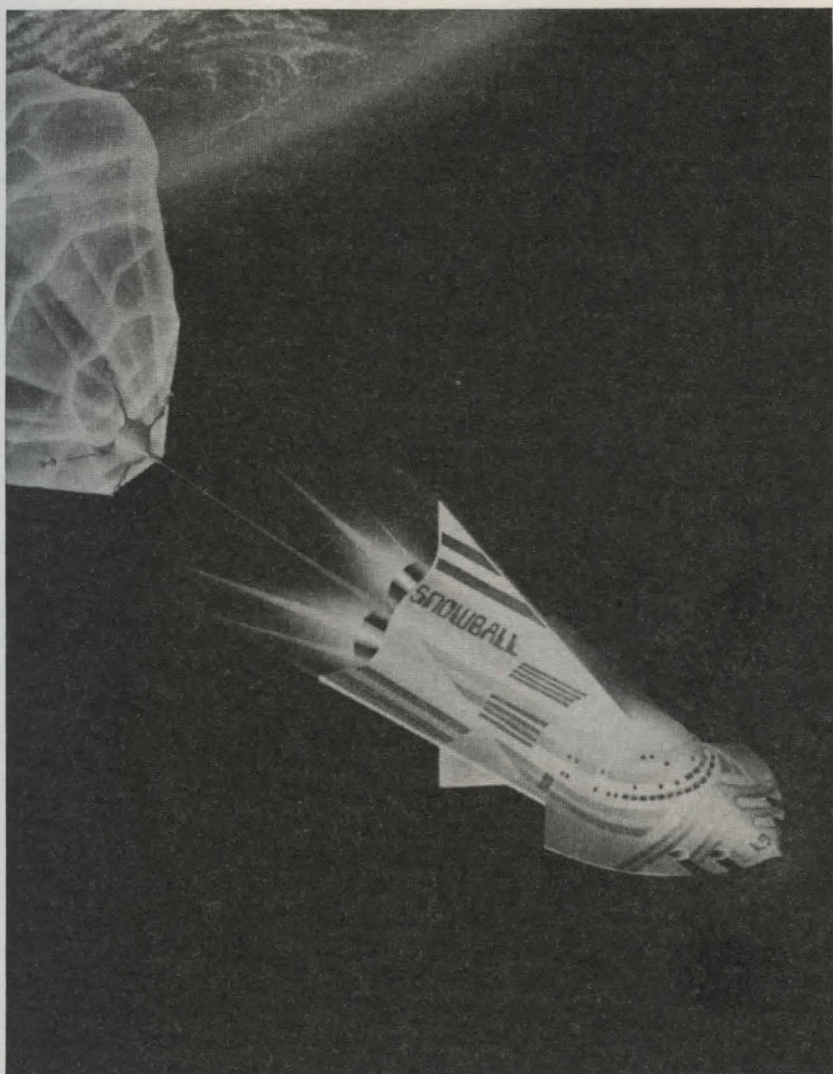
More Opening Moves

3.1 Colossal Adventure

I want us to look at some more adventure openings, simply because we can learn a great deal from them: they show clearly the varied styles of puzzle that can confront adventurers.

The very first adventure I bought, once I had a BBC Microcomputer, was Level9's **Colossal Adventure**. This was one of many implementations of the original Crowther & Woods adventure that are now available - and in this particular case it had a most entertaining and original endgame.

This adventure later became part of the Jewels of Darkness trilogy which was released for a considerable number of different computers.

You start off outside a building, with exits leading in various directions. My own first moves here were to go inside the building to see what it contained: I found a lamp, some keys, and a bottle. There was a well inside the building also. I'm glad I tried going down the well because there were some coins at the bottom - and it turned out that I was going to need them later on in the game.

After that, I went outside the building and - as it happened - explored
area outside to the north. Apart from finding various locations that did
seem to lead anywhere much, I came across a picnic area. It had two thi
which turned out to be of interest: there were some sandwiches - which I t
- and a notice forbidding the dropping of any litter. Being the sort of perso
am, I saved my current status, and then dropped the sandwiches which I I
just picked up.

It turned out to be deadly; but at least I knew. Personally, I always like to
out dangerous moves - simply out of curiosity, I suppose - but only whe
have saved my current status. I guess all adventurers need to be a bit like
elephant's child in the Just So stories: full of insatiable curiosity - though
not sure I want an elephant's nose; my own is quite long enough.

After that, I went back to the building, collected all the items I felt I wo
need - in this case the lamp, coins, keys and bottle - and left the sandwic
for any later use that they might have. This particular adventure limits
player's ability to carry things to only four items.

Next, I moved south and worked my way steadily along to the locked grat
which I proceeded to ignore until I had travelled to the top of the dried
waterfall. Once I was sure that nothing was to be gained by further outs
exploration, I returned to the grating, tried out the keys and entered w
proved to be the adventure proper.

The main lesson for newcomers to adventuring here, is that thorou
exploration of above ground areas is almost always essential before enter
any underground cavern system, however tempting going below may
There's many an adventure game player who has mourned the fact that he
she has dived happily down a hole without exploring everywhere else fi
In this case, if I'd not grabbed the sandwich early on, I would have be
exceedingly stuck when dealing much later with a sore-headed bear deep
the cave system.

3.2 Lords of Time

I now want to deal with one or two other openings of Level9 adventur
simply because they show clearly the variety that is on offer. After that, I sl
look at some superb ideas of other software houses which are clas
illustrations of clever opening puzzles.

Lords of Time (part of the **Time and Magik** trilogy) was, in fact, written b
housewife - Sue Gazzard - and included a most entertaining opening probl
as well as introducing the BBC adventure game enthusiast to the multi-le
concept of adventures. There were nine different time zones to be explo

tfore the baddies could be made to bite the dust. I liked that, and I suppose de history side of my education is responsible - I still read history for fun as well as philosophy.

Anyway, you start off sitting at home when there is a blinding flash: if you then enter the command **Look**, you find that you are in a living room - and Old Father Time tells you that there's a need to collect nine valuable treasures which are marked with an hourglass symbol.

Moving north from this location takes you to a large cold-looking room with a big Grandfather Clock, a matchbox (containing four matches), and a wax candle. At least I could be sure of an immediate source of light: my only problem was that of working out how long the matches would last - and I also had a sneaking suspicion that I might need a source of heat as well.

saved my status, took a match and lit it. After that it was just a question of naking various moves, counting them, and waiting until the match flickered out. After that I knew how many moves I could take before lighting the andle; I wasn't sure whether or not - as in many adventures - there would be a maximum number of turns that could be taken before the candle was onsumed. Where this ploy is used, it is often worked out on the basis of the number of dark locations, plus a few bonus turns to take account of forgetful adventurers who don't always extinguish their light source as quickly as they hould on emerging from the dark.

Clocks being what they are, I next paid attention to the Grandfather and tried vinding it: and that action opened a door which enabled me to think about ntering the clock itself. In passing, readers should note once again that some adventures make solving a puzzle the route into the proper depths of the game, while others allow you roam at will for quite a long time before you

get stuck. It's important to remember this fact and it is essential to work
which beginning is which fairly quickly, so that your grey cells can
working in the right direction.

Once I was inside the clock, I found that certain actions produced interes
results: there were cogs which were numbered 1 to 9; there was a mass
pendulum, and there was a single visible exit to the north.

Turning the cog (giving it a number) seemed to do something; and swing
the pendulum opened a door back into the cold-looking room. I begar
think we had our exits and our entrances. What I did next was to save
current position. After that, I explored by moving north when the cog wa
position 1, but only to see where I emerged. The only thing I did was to m
a note of the location description.

Next, by restoring the saved position I had made before starting
experiment, I turned the cog to 2 and toddled north once again, noting
location description once more. It wasn't possible to go back inside the cl
from many of the nine time zones without working through the wh
section, and so saving a position just before leaping off into somewhere r
turned out to be a very good idea indeed. It then meant that the Rest
command could pop me back where I needed to be quite easily with
having to complete my explorations or solve any puzzles.

It didn't take long to discover that each cog represented a different time z
and that moving north with the cog set to a different number meant
equally different exit location. I went methodically through the nine differ
cog settings with the aim of working out roughly what the time zones w
Only after that was I ready to explore.

I started by moving north through the exit with the cog at position 1 (wh
was a contemporary era) and it turned out to be the correct initial scenar
but there was to be a great deal of dodging back and forth between
different time zones before this exciting adventure got solved.

3.3 Dungeon Adventure

Another entertaining adventure from Level9 was the final part of the Jew
of Darkness trilogy - **Dungeon Adventure**. The early moves of this advent
meant tackling certain problems quite early on, even though - as usual wh
the Austins are concerned - it was possible to go exploring far and w
before being actually compelled to solve a puzzle.

On starting, you were told that you were on a mud bank by a wide river,
that there was a piece of driftwood and an open packing case nearby -

ere was also a path leading up. The driftwood turned out to be an important piece of equipment (a source of light) but the packing case, simple em that it was, I discovered had an even more important double role. I am nvinced that a number of adventure game players never discovered the cond use, perhaps because I only found out myself by sheer accident.

t the outset I did the obvious: I tried to get in to the open packing case - and cceeded. It turned out to be a bit like the Tardis - fans of Doctor Who will now that the Tardis is the size of a telephone box on the outside, but (thanks multi-dimensional foldings of space) it is absolutely enormous on the side. So, once I was inside the packing case, which was now described as a rge wooden box, I discovered yet another door: IN I went again.

he next description had me momentarily disorientated: I was upside down, erched on the ceiling of a room close by a chandelier. I grabbed the handelier - which I reckon is what anyone would do if they suddenly found emselves in that particular predicament - and everything then sorted itself ut. The room inverted, and suddenly I found myself in what was described s a large store room, and in it was a machine with a red button.

am a fully paid-up member of TSOCA (where adventures are concerned, nyway) so as one of The Society Of Cowardly (Cautious?) Adventurers I romptly saved my position and only then pressed the red button; after all, ed does usually stand for danger. As it happened, the outcome was eneficial: I was bathed in special rays that meant I could now be revived if I id something fatal.

he other thing I took note of was the fact that I was in a location described s a store room: I am always on the lookout for somewhere to dump the reasures I collect during my forays into dangerous dungeons - and this oked like the ideal place. You'll remember that, in **Philosopher's Quest**, ore points were awarded for depositing the treasures in the shop than you ained for finding them.

s an aside, you ought to note that there are three main types of mainstream dventure where the actual business of scoring is concerned - once again, they re a bit like Julius Caesar's idea of Gaul, I suppose; since he reckoned that aul was (as I recollect) *omnia divisa in partes tres*.

nyway the tripartite division where adventure scoring is concerned goes ke this. Some writers think that points are pointless: the game's the thing; rue adventurers are purely interested in penetrating puzzles. For them, it's a it like the business of art for art's sake.

hen there are those writers who like to dangle a carrot in front of us by way f awarding points for various things done so far as solving puzzles are

concerned. Mind you, they nearly always have a thumping big stick there
well in the shape of utterly withering messages when we do someth
designated as daft. Honestly...the names I've been called in my time wo
make a skunk feel fragrant!

Finally, there are the writers who pile points on for treasure taken and sto
safely somewhere or other: and thus we have the three types of adventure
far as scoring is concerned - purist, puzzle and plunder orientated. Persona
I love all three.

Anyway, back to the second use of that packing case, because I don't co
the resuscitation facility it provided as being a use as such. Once I had g
outside again I tried something which I didn't really expect to work: I ente
Take Packing Case. Now the reason I didn't expect it to work was becau
once I had explored inside, I reckoned that the mass of the case was goin
make it impossible to lift. I thought I'd be told I had contracted a herni
something. In fact I was told I could carry the case after all!

This meant that I could take my storage place with me; and that, once I
come across the treasures I expected to encounter, I would have I
difficulty in dumping them: minimum moves were going to be the orde
the day. However, I wouldn't like you to think that the packing case sol
all the carrying problems: it was quite a complicated business to get ins
deposit the treasure, and then continue exploring, though it was better t
returning to the river bank all the time. However, I still felt that I needed I
to carry extra items.

Restricting the number of items an adventurer may carry is a feature of q
a number of games - and this restriction is not limited to any partic
software house. The limit (if it applies) is either numerical, or is based
calculating the mass of various objects - which is a slightly more sophistica
way of going about making life difficult for us adventure fanatics.

During my outside explorations in **Dungeon Adventure**, I came ac
various items, and, (depending on what they were) I tried all sorts of acti–
upon them - always making sure that I had saved my position first. I
things, ate things, dropped things, wore things, waved things, threw thi
in fact I tried doing just about every possible action upon every poss
object. I learned an awful lot by going through this routine.

My most important discovery in this section of **Dungeon Adventure** wa
learn that I could become stronger by wearing something - and that m
that I could carry more objects. I was no longer limited either to putting e
extra item in the packing case, or to running back to the river bank every
I had my hands full of loot. I was free to roam at will collecting things, a
only bothered to put the packing case down when I came across somet

that I felt was simply a treasure, rather than a tool which also might turn out to be valuable, so far as my score was concerned.

3.4 The Price of Magik

Another adventure with an interesting opening scenario was **The Price of Magik** - another part of the Level9 **Time and Magik** trilogy. Here we find ourselves on a winding drive just outside a door: there was a woodshed to the west, a climbable vine which led up, and it was also possible to go in through the door.

its former self. Gnarled creepers cli
desperately to the walls, almost
completely enveloping the building. A
huge carved door with a blackened bra
knocker in the shape of a griffin's
head is set in the middle of the
sprawling facade. You can see a vine.
What now?
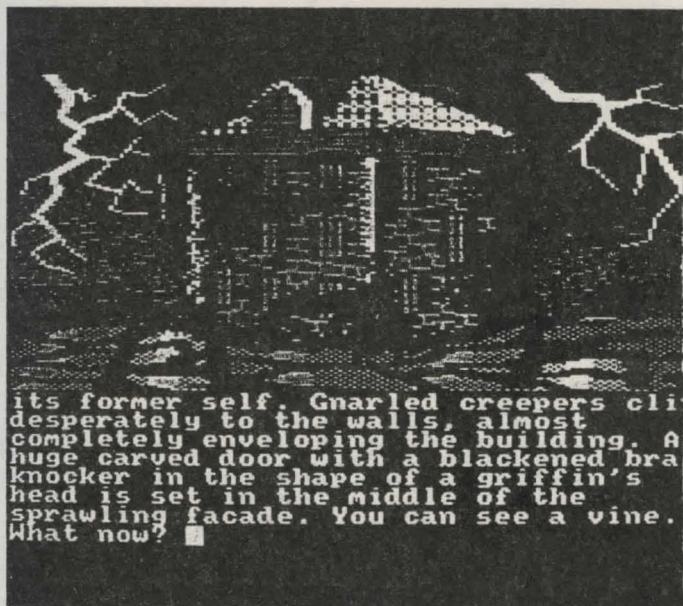
I still don't know if it was just because I am devious, ultra-suspicious or what, but I was about half way through the adventure before I tried opening the door! I originally decided that there just had to be something nasty lurking behind that door, and I was in no particular hurry to make its acquaintance. As it happened, there was no need to have worried, but on the whole it is sensible for adventure game players to cultivate nasty, suspicious minds.

What I did, instead of opening the door, was to go into the woodshed where I found a candle and a woodpile which I set light to. I'm not normally a pyromaniac but, on the basis that every possible action should be tried out, setting light to a woodpile was clearly a logical thing to do. This resulted in a
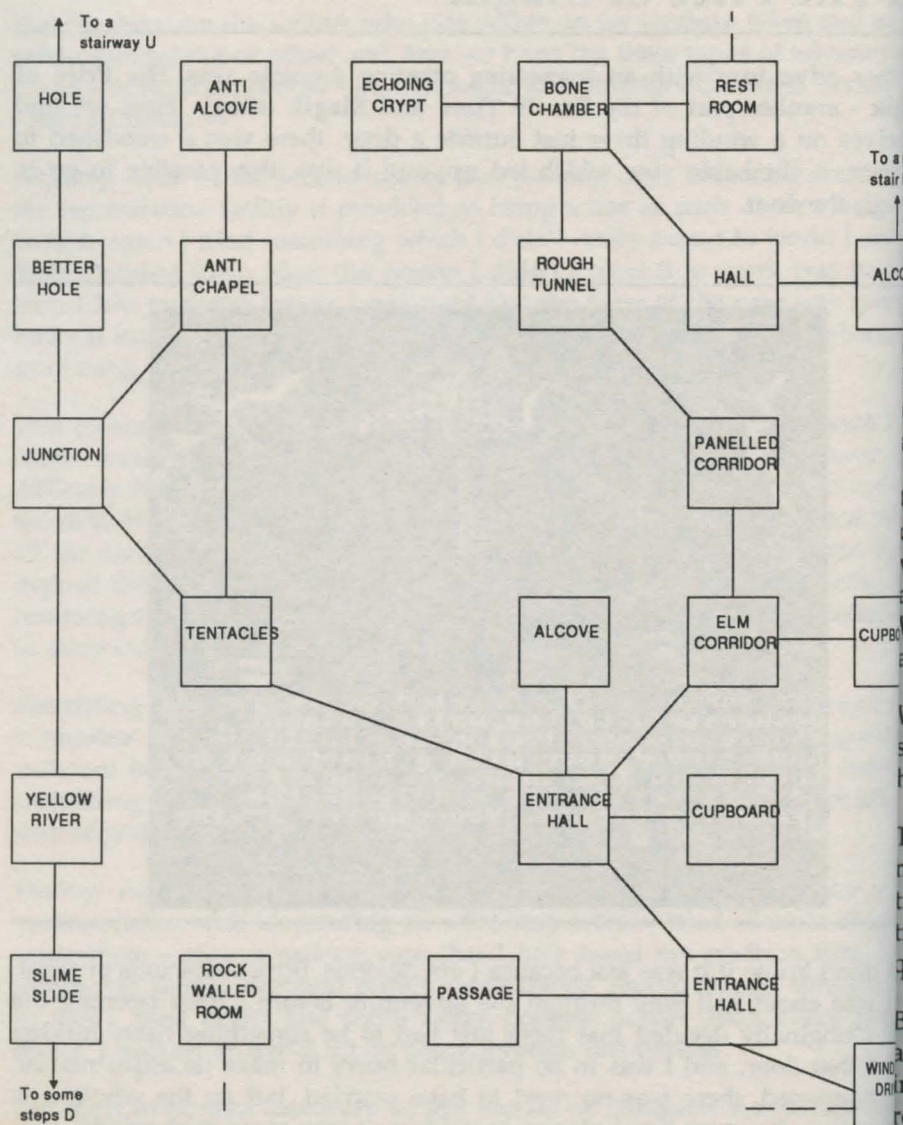
The Price of Magik

The Price of Magik – part of ground floor

Text labels within the diagram:

To a stairway U

HOLE

ANTI ALCOVE

ECHOING CRYPT

BONE CHAMBER

REST ROOM

To a stair

BETTER HOLE

ANTI CHAPEL

ROUGH TUNNEL

HALL

ALCO

JUNCTION

PANELLED CORRIDOR

TENTACLES

ALCOVE

ELM CORRIDOR

CUPBO

YELLOW RIVER

ENTRANCE HALL

CUPBOARD

SLIME SLIDE

ROCK WALLED ROOM

PASSAGE

ENTRANCE HALL

WIND DRI

To some steps D

pile of ash - and the ash turned out to be the focus for one of the spells which became available to me later on in the game.

By heading towards the woodshed, I also discovered that there was a herb garden nearby - and there I found some real treasures. There was some mandrake, an elder cross, some eyebright, a skull and a knucklebone wearing a ring. The mandrake turned out to have some liberating powers where the bones were concerned, and I was able to get hold of the diamond ring.

This ring was an example of what I mean by a valuable tool. Most people know that it requires a substance as hard as diamond to cut glass properly, and, sure enough, later on in the adventure there was some glass that needed cutting in order to access a recess which contained an aid to casting spells.

I nearly missed one clue in the description, though. I forgot - until I was well into the adventure - that sometimes a little judicious digging can be useful. The clue that you are given, when digging becomes a practical possibility, is usually to be told you are in a garden, or else that there is some soft earth around.

Only occasionally do you have to do something to the ground before you can dig in it - though in one adventure I have discovered that you need some worms to make the earth workable. In that particular case I wondered for ages what the worms were for, even though I knew what worms do to soil. Where I live, I have an acre of garden to keep tamed when I'm not taming adventure puzzles.

When I stopped to think about it, the clue in **Price of Magik** was actually staring me in the face - bones need a decent burial - but it was only when I had located the shovel, that eventually the penny dropped.

There was one other item from the herb garden that had me foxed momentarily - and that was the eyebright. I had it figured for a cosmetic to be traded for some kind of favour if I encountered a lady in distress during my travels. That couldn't have been more wrong! I found out this mistake very quickly once I returned to the starting location.

Back at the first location, I climbed up the vine and made my way to the top, and I then clambered on to the roof of the building where I was able to get into the attic. It was pitch black and I could see nothing. I had two choices, really; I could either go back down the vine and try entering through the forbidding door, or I could try and work out how to see in the dark. As I said earlier, I really didn't fancy that door, so I had to work out possible alternatives. In the dim long ago I used to be an optician, and so I wondered if some eye treatment might be in order. I rubbed the eyebright into my eyes and lo and behold, I could see!

I made one other mistake that had to be rectified later on in the game; a
only learned that from another adventure player. It's a good job
adventuring fans are so willing to help one another. That vine I had used
ladder could also be cut with anything that had a sharp edge to produ
staff which then became the focus for a spell. The lesson here is that
should never think we have exhausted all the possibilities once we have d
our best to explore the early locations in an adventure. I thought I had ta
that lesson on board with Lords of Time, and yet here was another adven
in the same trilogy that had got me taking things for granted once more.

3.5 Uninvited

Readers should be aware that graphic adventures require just as much car
the early moves as text adventures: I confess that it took me some tim
realise that; and in my early days of tackling them, I tended to move off
quickly.

I'm going to deal, therefore with a couple of examples of this genre, star
with the Mindscape adventure Uninvited. The background story shows
you have been involved in an automobile accident – and the first scene sh
you gazing through a starred windscreen. The text window revealed
following information:

*The last thing that you remember before the darkness rushed up to claim you is
brother's startled cry. You managed to swerve around the shadowy figure
appeared in the roadway, but lost control as the car jumped the shoulder and plu
headlong into this tree.*

*Swiveling your battered head you survey the wreckage. You realise that you
alone! Your kid brother must have gone off to get you some help. As you pry you
free off the steering wheel's embrace, you can't help but notice the pungent odo
gasoline as it leaks from the ruptured gas tank.*

Now apart from the transatlantic spelling, I learned two things from
initial description. First, it looked possible that the occult element would
a large part in this adventure. There are many stories of accidents occur
as drivers tried to avoid hitting a ghost.

Second, I was pretty sure that if I did not move quickly and decisively the
was going to catch fire: the mention of leaking fuel was too strong to
ignored. Therefore I had to get out of the car before the move counter deci
I should be fried.

The command window showed a limited but comprehensive number of verbs that I could click on with my mouse pointer. They were: Examine, Open, Close, Speak, Operate, Go, Hit and Consume. I therefore used the command Open (car) door and received the following message.

The car door opens with some effort. The accident has caused some damage to the car.

By using the command Go (the already open) door I was able to leave the car, and the screen showed new information.

BOOM! There is a mighty explosion behind you as your car bursts into flames. That will at least save you the cost of a tow. Better try to find your younger brother and have him call a cab instead of a tow truck.

The main picture had now changed. My inventory contained nothing and the sole exit led towards a forbidding mansion which flickered in the glare of lightning, while the thunder boomed away. I was told:

You stand at the front porch of a house. This old, Gothic mansion casts gloomy shadows all around you. A sharp wind cuts through your flesh to chill your bones. The pounding thunder grows louder and more threatening.

We clearly had all the ingredients for a nice cosy horror story with supernatural overtones. Since the sole exit leads into the house, that's where we shall eventually have to go, but on the basis that fools rush in where angels fear to tread we need to have a good look around first. The front garden contains two statues and a mail box.

What I did, therefore was to use the command Examine in relation to the statue on the left side of the screen. That produced the message:

A marble life-sized likeness of young Greek manhood adorns the front of the mansion. The Greek sculpture does not really match the Gothic architecture.

I should think not! So, the question is: are they trying to tell me something useful? Is the anachronism deliberate? I made a note just in case, and then tried other commands. I tried to Operate the statue on the basis that it could have been a lever which revealed a secret passage; I also tried the commands Open and Speak. Last of all, though I am not an iconoclast of Cromwellian dimensions, I even used the command Hit Statue. None of these had any effect, but remember: negative information is still useful information.

I now turned my attention to the other statue on the basis that nothing should ever be taken for granted. On examining it I received a slightly different message from the first and was told:

This marble statue represents a young Grecian man. He seems stationed to g
incoming visitors, but he seems out of place.

Notice how the anachronism is referred to once again. It may mean noth
but, on the other hand, it may be important. I tried the commands I had u
on the other statue and, because of the reference to *greeting* in the descripti
I again tried speaking to it – using the word "Greetings". I was then told:

The statue didn't hear you. It probably wasn't listening.

Oh well, it had been worth a try. I now turned my attention to the mailb
which I expected to yield more information than I had gleaned from
statues. The command Examine produced a laconic message:

The mailbox is the type that you would expect to see outside of a farm or seclu
rural residence.

The use of the command Open (I could also have used the verb Operate w
the same result) on the mailbox produced a new window, just overlaying
inventory, which revealed the contents of the box – an envelope. I examir
the envelope and was told:

It's an envelope. It's addressed to "Master Crowley, 666 Blackwell Road, Loch N
Scotland"

This was revealing. The late Aleister Crowley was a rather pathetic fig
who purported to be heavily into witchcraft and devil worship. He rat
fancied himself as a figure of evil. The address also contained use
information: 666 is the Number of the Beast in the Book of the Revelation
St. John the Divine – and stands for all sorts of nastiness. The supernatu
element is becoming clearer – and the elements are evil!

The command Open envelope revealed two items. I transferred them to
own inventory, ready for further investigation, closed the envelope a
mailbox, hit the mailbox (just in case) and examined it again. I was qu
interested to receive a new message which read:

Bits of rust dust cover the inside of the mailbox and have dropped to the gro
beneath it.

It was time to examine the first item – and the following information came
the screen:

It's a heavy chain necklace with a gaudy gold amulet attached. It looks very old
hand made.

Well, amulets are things I am attached to as well: gold chains are nothing special, but an amulet can be a powerful charm when dealing with supernatural nasties in adventure games. I tried to open it – just in case – but couldn't, and then I tried operating it though without any real expectations of anything happening at this early stage in the adventure. I wasn't disappointed.

The second item was a letter which clearly needed an examination in order to be read. I was now informed:

This note reads, "Dear Master, Please forgive me. My health prevents me from aiding you in your battle against the evil one. You teach your students well; they become too powerful for their own good. Enclosed is an amulet that should look familiar. Wear this charm and think of me. The undead fear symbology. Still the Evil; set it free for the sake of the family."

Now I confess I found this message a little confusing – probably because, in real life I am a little better informed than the person who composed it for the game. Nonetheless, I reckoned I could figure out the gist of it: a student of Crowley's had got delusions of grandeur and had become a bad apple (we'll leave aside the fact that the real life Crowley was rotten to the core) and so needed dealing with.

Somewhere in the game zombies and/or vampires were likely to be encountered and symbology (whatever that turned out to be) should be an effective protection or even an offensive weapon. Finally, the evil one would need to be paralysed in some way before it could be set free. Thus, there was some kind of old fashioned dualism at work here. It was time to open the front door and venture inside; on doing so I was met with the following message:

As you enter the mansion, the door slams closed behind you. Welcome home. This entrance hall is a large, extravagant, luxurious room, yet it feels strangely oppressive.

The graphic window revealed a room containing two chairs, a sofa and a carpet with a pentagram at its centre. There were a number of paintings on the walls, a marble bust and an open fireplace: in addition to the door I had emerged through there were two other exits.

The main part of the adventure was about to begin, but I had learned quite a bit by now. That is what careful exploration is all about: don't forget; in this account, I am only just into the third location of the whole adventure – and nary a puzzle or problem in sight so far.

3.6 Shadowgate

Another Mindscape Adventure which provides useful material on how
cope with the early moves of a graphic adventure is Shadowgate. You are s
battling the forces of evil, but this time you are cast in the heroic treasu
seeker and dragonslayer mould.

The opening picture showed a closed, studded, wooden door surmounted
a skull and the inventory window showed a flaming torch. The kind
illumination provided told me something at once – I was headed f
somewhere dark and this light source wasn't going to last forever.

Before I did anything else, therefore, I decided to find out just how long t
torch would last once I gained entry to the dungeon. I promptly popp
inside and then proceeded to examine everything in sight, counting off t
moves as I did so. After the 11th move the torch went out and I was plung
into darkness – I was also ready to begin the rest of my prelimina
explorations.

I went back to the beginning, and this time took some notice of t
introductory text which read as follows:

Good morning. Welcome to Shadowgate.

*The last thing that you remember is standing before the wizard Lakmir as he gestu
wildly and chanted in an archaic tongue. Now you find yourself standing at
entryway which lies at the edge of a forest. The Druid's words still ring in your ea
"Within the walls of the Castle Shadowgate lies your quest. If the prophecies h
true the dreaded Warlock Lord will use his dark magic to raise the Behemoth,
deadliest of the Titans, from the depths of the earth. You are the seed of prophecy,
last of the line of kings, and only you can stop the Warlock Lord from darkening
world FOREVER. Fare thee well."*

All pretty standard stuff really; nevertheless it pays to take precautions, a
so the first thing I did was to give that skull a closer examination. T
message came:

*It is the skull of some creature. Whatever it is, its meaning is quite clear: Death lu
inside.*

I was not satisfied that I had learned everything there was to know here a
so I used the command Open on the skull – and it happily obliged. Tuck
inside it was a small brass key which I promptly added to my inventor
While I was at it – just in case there was anything else left – I also tried t
command Operate on the skull; that also worked, but only in the way that t

command Close would have done. It was now time to open that forbidding door again.

Inside the door you find yourself in a long corridor. There are two unlit torches waiting your attention, a nice red carpet (which I thought was quite an ironic touch) and two locked doors. I tried operating the small brass key on them, and the double doors ahead of me unlocked.

It was time to kindle a fresh torch and move further on into the adventure. If I had not taken time over that skull I would have got nowhere. This serves as a reminder – if you need one – that nothing should ever be taken for granted, and that everything you encounter should be subject to as rigorous a testing procedure as you can think up.

4

Last Initials

4.1 The move counter beginning

I want to turn the focus now onto one or two adventures which will be of particular interest to owners of the BBC Microcomputer and the Archimedes series, though I believe that the lessons to be learnt here will help everyone. So skip this chapter at your peril - we shall widen the selection of computers dealt with again towards the end of the chapter.

Many adventures allow for more or less quiet reflection and plenty of experimentation during their early stages: you can wander about at will without too many drastic things happening unless you also start to experiment with the various items that you encounter. As I've said before, saving your position prior to experimentation is an absolute must: if you fail to do that, you deserve everything you get. The exceptions to this rule are adventures which employ a move counter during the early stages. Some even go so far as to use a move counter throughout, but we'll deal with them later on.

4.2 Enthar Seven

The adventure with the opening stages which got my heart pounding hardest, my blood pressure off the screen, my mouth dry and my fingers all trembly, was **Enthar Seven** - a multi-part adventure by the software firm Robico which, to the best of my knowledge, specialised purely for the Acorn computers. I shall always be grateful to Robert and Mike O'Leary; if they had produced no other adventure, **Enthar Seven** would still have left me (and many other adventure game players) totally transfixed with delight.

The start of the game was amusing in its own right; a really good adventu
will always use some imaginative method for starting you off on your to
and tribulations and **Enthar Seven** is no exception - as you'll see in
moment.

As well as having a superbly detailed illustration (the Acorn Archimedes h
an excellent graphics capability) the text of **Enthar Seven** began: *Umm, exc
me. Ahem. Hello? What are you doing? You're not allowed to do that. Hello? I s
you're not allowed to do that! Hey you! Stop! Come back...*

*Ignoring the angry shouts from the large, red faced man charging down the corrid
you stepped through the veil of light into the gleaming teleport cubicle and slamm
your fist into the button! The rings of light embedded in the floor and ceiling puls
energetically and you braced yourself for the uncomfortable moment when your bo
would be torn apart, atom by atom, to be reassembled, moments later, on the Flig
Deck of an Interplanetary Space Hopper orbiting a small, Earth-like planet call
Enthar Seven.*

Now this introduction gave me two clues about the game at once. I reckon
that I would be using some kind of teleport system again during the gam
and I also figured that some, if not most, of the adventure would take pla
on the surface of the planet. The adventure text then continued as follow
once I had pressed the space-bar.

*You are sitting in the relaxing comfort of a black BodyForm Pilot's Chair at the wi
polished control console of an Interplanetary Space Hopper. The panel before y
dazzles with the flickering colours of a million light emitting diodes and fr
somewhere behind you comes the steady, deafening drone of the craft's powerful pu
engines. Gazing around, you can see that the Flight Deck is equipped with only
barest essentials for a short space journey. There is a space helmet here.*

The description added to my store of preliminary information in seve
ways. First and foremost, the bit about bare essentials and a short journ
confirmed my feeling that a safe arrival on the surface of the planet would
required before the main adventure started.

There were, of course, two other bits of information: the mention of a spa
helmet and the fact that I was sitting down. I entered the command Stan
and the description changed in several ways; exits were now given, and the
was a strong hint that the Space Hopper contained a teleportation device.
next input was **Take Helmet** - and I was informed that I couldn't do that.

What had I done wrong? Robert O'Leary isn't the sort of adventure wri
who tells you something is there when it really is somewhere else; he does
make sloppy mistakes of that kind. I entered **Sit** followed by **Take Helm**
and this worked. However, there was now a new addition to the scre
messages: *Amber lights set in the walls pulse menacingly and an alarm sounds.*

At this stage, I wasn't too worried, though I began to suspect that a move counter was at work, designed to rattle my nerves and raise my blood pressure. The next input I experimented with was **Wear Helmet** - this turned out not to be a good idea; I was promptly informed that no oxygen supply was available, and that I was suffocating. I admit to having slightly shredded nerves by now. **Remove Helmet** and **Stand** were the commands which I now entered in quick succession.

I next had the choice of moving either west towards what I suspected was the teleport system designed to take me away from the Space Hopper, or else south to explore the ship further - and that's the direction I chose on the grounds that there was likely to be some more vital equipment to be collected before I hit the planetary surface.

South took me to a place in the Hopper's corridor where I could either go west or continue south. I chose **West** and found myself in a dusty store room with lots of shelving - but there seemed to be nothing there. I wondered if there was something high up, maybe out of sight, so I entered **Climb Shelves** only to be asked in which direction I wanted to climb. This told me that the parser would allow **Climb Down** as well as **Up** and so I asked to ascend. I was told I couldn't - and I was also told something else. The amber light message was replaced by: *Red lights set high up in the walls are flashing urgently and a siren wails! All is definitely not well.*

I can't honestly say that I kept my cool. Even though I was busy reminding myself that it was only a silly computer game, and it didn't really matter what happened; I was getting all hot and bothered. Nevertheless, I did manage to stay reasonably rational as well as increasingly agitated, and I realised that a desirable entry might be **Search Shelves**.

I then discovered that I'd got a torch. My next entry was **Light Torch** - only to get the chilling reply: *nothing happens*, so (just in case the parser wouldn't cope) I tried **Switch On Torch** and received the same negative.

Now I've go to admit that the second attempt at lighting the torch was a pretty vain one; a Robico adventure doesn't contain that kind of problem parser. I had however confirmed what I suspected - the torch needed a power source. When gnomes and elves abound in the scenario, coins or vending machines and batteries also abound. Indeed, I've even come across one (admittedly spoof) adventure where you had to put some batteries into a vending machine in order to get a coin! The coin bought a map, by the way.

Anyway, back in the Space Hopper, it was time to press on and try to locate the power source the torch clearly needed. **East** took me back into the corridor, and **South** took me to the engine room. It also produced the following message:

The scream of the siren is swamped by the whine of the straining engines, and
ominous judder of metal as the Space Hopper spirals from its orbit! Blue spa
shower from exploding electronics and pools of molten substances merge as the h
shields finally give way! The scorching, searing pain lasts a mere moment...

There followed the laconic information: *You're dead.*

So, I had learned a great deal, in fact and - because it is only a game - the c
of learning those facts was simply the price of pressing the space bar a
starting all over again. Would that life were so simple! Next time, of cou
my moves were far more economical; I found the source of power for t
torch, worked out how to use it and then teleported myself into the m
game where I had more fun than I can ever adequately describe.

We shall return to **Enthar Seven** later in the book, because it has a su
maze in the first major section of the game - and it was a type I'd never co
across before. In the meantime, I want to look at the opening moves in t
more Robico classics; **Myorem** and **Blood of the Mutineers.**

4.3 Myorem

Myorem had a opening that was even more taut than **Enthar Seven**; th
were less moves to play with, and a similarly fatal ending if you didn't w
out what was needed in the required time. The start was as follows.

Gazing around, you see that you are in the southwest corner of a large, dusty ar
bound to a sturdy post with thick ropes. Smooth, stone walls, ancient and yellow
surround you, reflecting the sunlight into your eyes. You are choked by the
pushed into your mouth minutes before. You can say nothing. You can do noth
You have only your thoughts. There is nowhere to go from here!

You are secret agent Rick Hanson, and **Myorem** is the final part in a tril
featuring this intrepid sleuth - but it didn't seem as if there was a lot
mileage in the "with one bound he was free" type of strategy. In fac
quickly deduced the first move that was required by a very careful readin
the text - good adventures NEVER cheat. However, I still wanted to see w a
was going to happen.   s
                                                                              e
My first entry, therefore, was **Look.** I then saw a repeat of the orig
description plus two more lines of text which told me: *You are unable to sa* p
do anything! and *The sound of footsteps drifts in from the distance.*   e
                                                                              e
I then added various commands which I felt would not work so as e
continue exploring this particular scenario to the bitter end. I tried to f

myself physically in a variety of ways. For each fruitless move a message followed.

There is the sound of marching.

Soldiers march into the arena.

There is not long to go.

The arena is filled with ominous silence which lingers in the atmosphere and is suddenly broken by the shout of "Fire!". There is a storm of bullets.

Press space to play again.

To get the game started properly you needed to realise the importance of the message in the opening description which read: *You have only your thoughts.* Those adventure game players who have encountered the philosopher Descartes will know that his most memorable maxim was: *Cogito ergo sum* - I think, therefore I am. Leaving aside the fact that some modern philosophers would argue that he had made an invalid deduction, it still suggests that thought is a mighty powerful process.

The required initial entry, to enable you to thwart the firing squad and see what could be done to redress the situation, was **Think**. All of a sudden, memory flooded back (**Myorem** was - of course - an anagram of Memory) and there you were, back in a ditch. This time, you were going to do things properly. The real start of this entertaining adventure was a very long chaining puzzle - and we'll look at this kind of puzzle, though not the Myorem example, in detail later because they tell us a great deal about how a truly good adventure works.

4.4 Blood of the Mutineers

The third Robico adventure which had an entertaining beginning was **Blood of the Mutineers**. Here we have a very different background from the future era of **Enthar Seven** and the present day political predicaments of **Myorem** - it's a couple of centuries back when the age of sail was at its heyday, and steam was hardly a serious possibility so far as propelling ships went.

You start off with a coat, leggings, shirt and boots all worn - and a cutlass to keep the baddies at bay. This is just as well, since the sounds of a mutineering crew can be heard making a nuisance of themselves through an open door to the north of you.

There is a closed door to the east, a closed window to the south; and there
sleeping quarters to the west - so what do we do? It's a question of decid

whether to join the mutineers or beat
them. Attempting to join them places
you in jeopardy; beating them is best.

So, shut that open door and then bolt
it; only after that is it safe to explore
the sleeping quarters. This exploration
turns out to be absolutely essential.
Here you need to examine and
check just about everything,
because there is a key to be found
which opens a trophy cabinet (con-
taining leg irons and a wooden arm)
and a hidden drawer which conceals a
map.

You've not deterred the monstrous
mutineers as yet, though! The secret
of these early moves is to get the irons
and the arm, move the table over to the door
and then use the irons to clamp the table to
the door handle. Only after that can you return to the sleeping quarters
institute a search that will reveal the rest of the items needed to start yo
on the road to escape.

4.5 Scapeghost

The last adventure we are going to look at as an example of an intereb
start is one that was available on a number of formats. **Scapeghost** wa
another Level9 offering that presented an intriguing plot with an un h
twist. It was also the final foray by the Austins into pure adventures - a e
time of writing they are concentrating more on strategy games - and f
Scapeghost had the most sophisticated development of their parser f
adventure system.

Level9 games could no longer be crammed into the memory constrain w
unexpanded BBC Microcomputers. You needed a minimum of 48k and
then you had to have more memory available in order to see the illustra h
Owners of larger capacity computers - Amigas, Amstrads, Apple IIs, it
and PCs - were, however, amply catered for. It's strange how we old c he
on the home computing scene were once pathetically grateful for 16k bl
and now (for some things) we wonder how to cope with only a Megabyt an

Funerals aren't usually laughing matters, though even they can have their lighter moments so long as you are not one of the chief mourners; but it must be quite an experience to find yourself at a funeral, only to discover - eventually - that it is your own. As Alan Chance you remember that you were on an under-cover mission, trying to infiltrate a drugs gang with your colleague Sarah.

All was going reasonably well when someone - or maybe something - tipped off the gangsters. Sarah was taken hos-tage, and you were killed; and (to add insult to homicide) your fellow police officers mistakenly blame a blunder of yours as the reason for the gangsters rumbling that they had been rumbled. Alan has three nights to disprove the false accusation, clear his name and defeat the gangsters.

In passing, as far as I am concerned Level9 is just about the least sexist of adventure software houses: the chief protagonist in an adventure is just as likely to be female as male. They rapidly recognised the fact that adventures attracted the attention, and intellectual skills, of girls and women just as much as they did those of boys and men.

In Scapeghost - to my mind at least - there were two main problems: the first was pretty general and can be summed up by the question "What on Earth (pun/reference intended) am I supposed to do?". The second was, in a way, more practical (physiological, anyway) "How on Earth do I manipulate objects in this adventure?"

The sophistication of the parser was tremendously helpful; long gone were the days when **Get Lamp** was the style of input expected. By now, a number of adventure writers had - more or less simultaneously - developed the idea of pseudo-independence where peripheral characters in an adventure were concerned. Thus, a degree of interaction between the player and the other characters became possible in a way that went far beyond the axe-throwing dwarves and pirate pickpockets of early adventure games.

This development helped me a great deal. I spent early sessions exploring, without feeling under pressure to do much more than gather information. The nature of my normal occupation is such that I am extremely lucky if I am able to spend very much more than a couple of hours at a time on adventure games, even though I'd dearly love to do more than that. These constraints

impose a certain discipline - and perhaps hold out hope to those of you v
secretly stuff an illicit disk into your PC (or whatever) when things are sl
at work - it's amazing what even 10 minutes can do; so long as you t
careful notes, that is.

Thus, my first task was to wander round; but rather than doing so in pu
exploratory mode - ambling amiably and aimlessly from location to locatic
I used the **Follow** command so as to find out what people were up t
learned some useful facts, and some totally useless information as well:
adventure mirrored life - or maybe death. I also, after a time, discovered
or two other insubstantial characters; as we communicated, I discovered so
hard facts into the bargain.

One fact that I was fully aware of - from the introductory material - was
a move-counter operated throughout the whole adventure: these explora
sessions were actually going to save me time when things got serious ar
began to make moves which I hoped would result in problems solved. S
a reminder to beginners: don't rush in there, exploration time added
note-taking is well worth the bother. It's only when there is a prize for
first player who successfully completes the game that the pressure piles
and (for a number of reasons) I am usually exempted from this sort of thin

Anyway, let's move to the second and - in many ways - more diff
problem: how on Earth can an insubstantial Ghost manipulate thoroug
substantial items? It soon was clear that **Scapeghost** offered lots of thing
be treated in various ways. For a start, it didn't take too long to discover
I was more or less confined to the boundaries of the Cemetery. Clearly,
preliminary action had to take place here where I had some kind of stren
little though it was.

Somewhere in the churchyard which was a depressing place, with on
those ghastly church fund appeal thermometers outside it which proclair
the world that they have failed, I found some plastic bags. They were to
beyond my powers to manipulate. I could **Examine** them without
problem, but anything else was impossible. Soon after, a spotlight came
and that was that. Time to start again. As the introductory text in the g
said: this was going to take a bit of getting used to.

I clearly was going to encounter objects which needed manipula
however, I wasn't going to work out how to do this very easily. Ran
exploration (in spite of what I've written earlier) seemed the only way, so
I set; but this time I wasn't looking for information, I was looking for th
that even a ghost might carry. Whatever they were, they were bound t
light, insubstantial things - it was a question of looking for the lightes
weight) thing around since I already knew that light (in the visible sense)
inimical.

I wandered steadily around, looking for items that could best be described as insubstantial, and this took some time. Eventually, however, I located a fellow sufferer's grave where the location description included the words: *I could see some thistledown*. I tried to take it and succeeded; the proper move had now been taken because I also had the following message: *I felt slightly stronger*.

These experiences told me two valuable things: the area of the churchyard was certainly going to be where the first part of the adventure took place. Secondly, I could manage to manipulate items located in the adventure provided I gradually increased my strength by picking up things in a carefully graduated order of increasing mass. I was ready to begin.

I know this sounds long and discursive, but I can only re-inforce what I have written earlier: careful meticulous exploration in the early stages of an adventure, allied to careful note-taking, can save a great deal of time in the end. We shall be looking at the benefits of the relentless application of logic where adventure puzzles are concerned quite soon. Meanwhile, we have to learn to ignore those exciting, adrenalin-producing opening adventure scenarios. We mustn't mind being killed, we mustn't mind being lost here and there: we must learn to take methodical, purposeful, efficient notes - and that way we'll beat the problems in the end.

Finally, to sum up these chapters on getting started, I am going to list the Ten Golden Rules that will make for an ultimately successful solution, even though they nearly always involve a slow start. It's the old principle dealt with in the fable of the Hare and the Tortoise.

4.6 The ten golden rules

❏ Read the documentation and background story carefully.

❏ Check what you are wearing and carrying the moment you are at the starting location.

❏ Investigate the properties of every single item you are told about, by doing everything you can think of to and with them.

❏ Test every direction for exits in case there is a concealed one somewhere, by methodically entering all eight compass directions (North, Northeast, East, Southeast, South, Southwest, West, and Northwest) together with Up and Down.

❏ Look for a light-source - and remember its use may be governed by a move-counter.

❑ See if there is a particular place where treasures can be stored - your s
may depend on this.

❑ Use the verbs Examine and Search regularly, unless the game rap
indicates that this is a waste of time. If it does, then pay extra attention
each location description as a source of valuable information.

❑ Look for a way of carrying extra items.

❑ Try to work out if a move-counter is active in the adventure as a whole.

❑ Above all - save your status before trying anything potentially dangerou

Ingrid Bottomlow, star of Gnome Ranger and Ingrid's Back

5

Maps and Mapping Techniques

5.1 The danger of not making a map

It's time to start seriously thinking about real moves into an adventure. As I've indicated before, the biggest temptation for a beginner to adventuring is the lure of hurtling off (metaphorically at least) into the wide blue yonder.

The unwary novice will soon find him or herself lost in the depths of the game, with little idea as to where they are or why they are in that particular location. By then, the chances are that they feel rather frustrated. I know, I've done it enough in my early adventuring years - and I still fall prey to
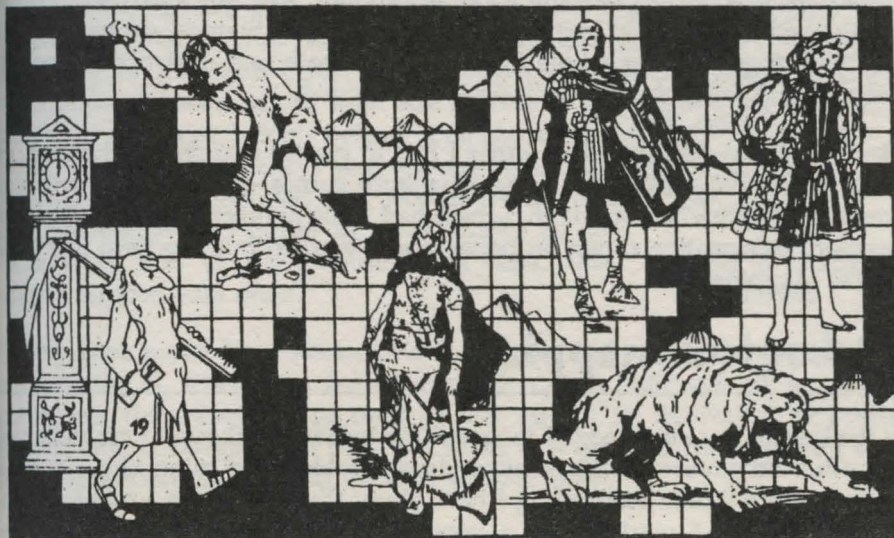
Don't forget to construct a map!

temptation, though these days I try to kid myself that I am just going on
exploratory romp.

We can't say that the adventure writers haven't warned us; almost alwa
one of the first bits of advice offered in any documentation is the exhortati
Make a map. While this may be excellent advice, it can also be off-putting
you happen to be someone like me.

5.2 A personal dilemma

It's not that I am impatient - well, not much, anyway - it's just that, wh
map making is concerned, I am hopelessly incompetent. When I was
school, at a point in my career when certain decisions had to be made,
geography master and I came to an amicable agreement. He would not wa
his time trying to teach me geography and I would not waste my time try
to learn it. Instead I was allowed to devote the lesson time to extra Germ
studies. I'll leave you to decide which option you would prefer. The decid
factor was that I simply could not visualise or remember a map: I was ha
to recall facts and figures about different parts of the world, but every
often in a test or exam there would appear those forbidding words "Mak
map...."

To begin with (where adventure games were concerned) I tried to start afre
I resolutely drew little boxes with arrows and direction indicators show
where I thought I was and where I had come from, even though I had no
notion of how to cope with any Up or Down moves. It soon became clear
I was almost better off bashing away at random. Any so-called map I dr
soon looked like a ball of knitting wool does after my Siamese cat has deci
that the one aim of her whole life is to visit death and destruction upor
The map and the wool both look decidedly ragged.

It seriously was decision time: either I had to master mapping techniques
else I had to consider abandoning adventure games - not a pretty prosp
Eventually, it dawned on me that there had to be another way of putting
necessary information down on paper, and I worked out a system that I
Logical Mapping.

5.3 Logical mapping

To the best of my knowledge I invented the technique, though I am deligh
that other adventurers with similar visual problems to mine have foun
helpful, and the only real feeling I have about the business is a quiet glov
satisfaction that I worked out a way of staying with adventure gam
instead of being forced to give up the whole pastime.

5.3.1 Principles of logical mapping

The principle is simplicity itself, and I'm going to describe the actual technique in considerable detail so that you can see exactly how it works. There must be plenty of fellow sufferers looking for relief.

The first - and most obvious thing - is that every location is given a number: thus, the opening scene is always given the number One. Next, I would summarise the location description and make a careful note of any special instructions.

After that, I would catalogue every item found in that location, indicating at the same time whether or not the instructions **Search** or **Examine** were needed in order to reveal it. The next two columns would record the direction of any moves made, and the result - either in the form of a new location number, or else in a comment, such as Fatal.

5.3.2 Creating a pathway

I gradually developed a technique of moves that still needs some refining, but at least now I reckon to know more or less where I am and how I got there. This is absolutely essential when you are trying to retrace your steps along a fairly complicated path in order to collect an item that you think is needed to solve a current puzzle.

The technique works something like this: I am in location One, and I am faced with a description, possibly with an account of some items that will probably prove useful, and maybe even an indication of available exits. Having noted the description and worked out what else is around, I turn very sceptical: I don't believe a single word about the available exits - and especially if the room description includes the words: *Visible exits are...* Sometimes that is put in just to make us do extra work but, in my experience at least, this doesn't happen very often.
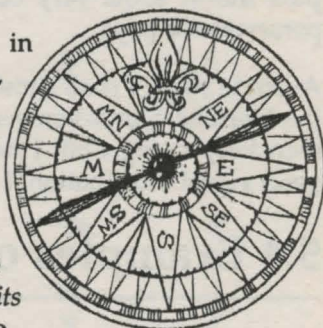
Compass for creating a pathway

So, my next move from Room One is to enter the instruction **North** or the abbreviation **N**, whether or not an available exit is indicated. As far as I am concerned, the message: *You can't go that way* or its equivalent is positive information, not negative. If there is a move as a result, then the place I arrive in becomes location Two and we start all over again.

Here, there are two possibilities, and you should make up your mind whi technique you use because, so long as you are consistent, you will be able move rapidly through the adventure - once it is mapped out - at w knowing where you are in a way that is as good as a visual map.

This is the choice: either return to location One and enter the instruction N and, if you move, designate the result Room Three. You should then retu again to Room One to enter **East**, and record the result. You continue like tl through all the eight compass directions from Room One before adding l and Down. After this you would - to stay logical - continue the procedure exactly the same way from Room Two and so on *ad infinitum*.

My own opinion is that one would soon get pretty confused and rapidly l if you used that method, so what I do is this. If, on moving **North** from Roc One, I can get somewhere, I record the details and then move on again fro location Two starting with **North**. I then pursue this course for as long a can.

Once I can no longer move **North** from any location, I stay where this l become impossible, and try **Northeast** and the other compass directions ur I can move once more. I then go back to trying to move **North** and I contin moving steadily until I come to a dead-end. After that, I retrace my steps ur the nearest unexplored branch can be located and plod off once more. I th keep doing that until I have explored every possible location. Sometimes puts me in some very odd areas at an early stage but, to coin a phra: perseverance pays.

At some stage, I shall finish back at Room One, ready to start branching off the **Northeast**, or wherever the next accessible direction takes me. And I sh then keep going until I have exhausted all the possible branches. If I ha good visual imagination, I guess this would look something like a tree.

5.4 Examples of a logical map

Now I'm going to give an example from an adventure already mentione **Lords of Time**, part of the Level9 **Time & Magik** trilogy. It will giv concrete example of what I mean - and I'll do the same with one or t others so that you can get a very clear idea of what is involved.

5.4.1 Lords of Time

Level 1

ROOM	DESCRIPTION	MOVE	RESUL
1	Sitting at home: blinding flash	Look	2

2	Living Room. *Hourglass* on mantelpiece Picture of Old Man. Hourglass valuable treasure, sands almost through. Father Time says Collect 9 items marked with hourglass symbol.	N	3
3	Large cold-looking room. Big grand-father clock. *Matchbox* (4 matches) *Wax Candle*. Exits S & N. **Wind clock to open door.**	S IN	2 4
4	Inside clock. Cogs 1-9, Massive pendulum. Only visible exit N Swing pendulum to open door. **Turn cog (n) for appropriate time level.**	OUT	5
5	At end of gravel drive bending to W. Open door & narrow country road N/S. Exits N, S (door) & W.	S N W	4 6 10
6	At crossing of country roads. Exits N, E, S & W.	S N E W	5 7 8 9
7	Roadworks where road ends. Only visible exit S. Grubby *Pick* (for hacking at hard material) and 2 *short Planks* (sturdy wood).	S	6
8	On long road. Fades to mist Only visible exit W.	W	6
9	Long straight road; fades to W. Only visible exit E.	E	6
10	Winding gravel drive. Exits E & W	E W	5 11
11	Outside country cottage Through door	E W	10 12
12	Hallway at foot of stairs. Open door	E	11

	Masai *Spear* (colourful souvenir)	S	13
		W	14
		UP	15
13	Kitchen; wall cupboard (open it)	N	12
	Tin of Catfood (Kattomush)	W	14
14	Living room. Patio door to garden	E	12
	Inlaid Looking-Glass & yuk message	S	13
	Metronome (treasure). Through door	W	18
15	Landing at top of stairs. Exits	D	12
		W	16
		N	17
16	Master bedroom *Jewellery Case* sole exit	E	15
17	Store room. Only visible exit is	S	15
	Coil of Rope (hessian)		
	Rucksack (**wear** to carry more)		
	Family rubbish (**search** for *Tin Opener*)		
18	On Patio, urns of flowers	E	14
	Garden shed lies to.....	SW	19
		W	23
		NW	27
19	Outside garden shed	NE	18
	Keys (out of reach **Wave** *Lodestone*)	E	20
		IN	29
20	Garden gate opens onto paved path.	W	19
		E	21
21	Paved path leading E/W	W	20
	Compost Heap (**Examine x 1** for *Coin*)	E	22
	Exam x 2 for *Mushroom Ring* (**Eat it**)		
	Give *Tiger Tooth* to Fairy for *Coin*		
	and *Firefly* (light) by refusing 1st offer.		
22	Carport & Pit in floor	W	21
	Red Porsche (**Open** to get *Petrol*)	D	CLOCK

23	At end of Garden by 5 foot fence	E	18
		U	24
24	Beside fence on E bank of clogged stream	N	25
		S	26
		U	23
25	Further upstream (narrower)	S	24
	Narcissus opposite.	Cross	28
	Tie *Planks* with *Rope* to make bridge.		
26	Beside stream; *weeping willow.*	N	24
	Wave *Valerian* for deathwish message.		
	Cut *Tree* with *Axe* for *Teardrop.*		
27	In flower garden; *Valerian* amongst	SE	18
	delphiniums.		
28	Sad *Narcissus* complains about stream.	Cross	25
	Give *Looking-Glass* to get *Lodestone.*		
29	Shed containing sharp *Axe* & *Shovel*	Out	19

As you can see, making a map in this way gives you a great deal of information and, with a little practice, it is very easy indeed to move to any location with an absolute minimum of fuss. I'll do another example, just to make things abundantly clear; this time, the opening section of Enthar Seven.

5.4.2 Enthar Seven

There are certain elements that differ in my mapping technique this time, even though Enthar Seven is a multi-sectioned adventure like Lords of Time. This is largely

Lords of Time

because I had gained more experience by the time I came to tackle Enthar Seven. The most obvious difference is that I gave locations on the Space Hopper the prefix letter "a"; I gave the planetary base no prefix and the different sections were numbered S1 to S7 - as you'll see in a moment. Also, notice how emphasis to certain particular words acts as a useful reminder of the specific input that is required; so here we go.

ROOM	DESCRIPTION	MOVE	RESUL
a1	Sitting at controls of Space Hopper. *Helmet.*	Stand	a2
a2	Standing on flight deck next to chair. *Display screen* **exam** to see orbit decay. Two archways.	S	a3
a3	Short corridor, wide archway to W.	N	a2
		S	a5
		W	a4
a4	Store room (**search**) *Torch.* **Exam** (*hexagonal*).	E	a3
a5	Engine room: *socket* (*hexagonal*) **Insert** *torch* **Into** *socket.*	N	a3
a6	Small cylindrical chamber, *green button.* **Torch on**; give button a....	Push	1
1	Hallway, wide passageway, many exits.	N	8
		E	9
		W	6
		SE	10
	Archway in wall...	S	5
	Wooden steps......	NW	2
2	Bottom of steps	SE	1
		UP	3
3	On flight of steps	UP	4
		D	2
4	Top of steps; plain visible through glass door. *Vertical slot* for *Key card.*	E	??
		D	3
5	Cylindrical Chamber. *Plastic keypad.* Seven numeric keys preceded with "S".	N	1
		S1	1.01
		S2	2.01
		S3	3.01
		S4	4.01
		S5	5.01

		S6	6.01
		S7	7.01
6	Store room, shelves; *Vacuum Cleaner*.	E	1
	Needs *Battery* (7), *Plaster* (15)	U	7
7	Top shelf; *Power Cell* (battery).	D	6
8	Passage, sign: "Command Centre"	N	19
		S	1
9	Cubicle; *Map* (**Take** then **Look** again)	W	1
		N	23
10	Carpeted corridor	NW	1
		SE	11
11	Corridor	NW	10
		E	12
12	Corridor	W	11
	Archway...	S	14
		E	16
	Alcove...	N	13
13	Alcove (empty)	S	12
14	Grubby unfurnished room; door Red cross	S	15
	Corridor...	N	12
15	Disused cupboard; *Rubber Gloves* and *Sticking Plaster*	N	14
16	West end of Rest Room; carpet & *Chair*	E	17
	Sit to discover *Cushion*, **Sit** again to	S	18
	find *note*: Meta, *Key card* in *Safe*, Ben	W	12
17	East side of Rest Room; *Sofa, Painting*	W	16
	Remove *Painting* to reveal *Wall Safe.*		
18	Landing at top of spiral staircase	N	16
		D	20

| 19	Large chamber, view of Spaceship.	S	1
20	Open staircase	U	16
		D	21
21	Tiled passageway	U	20
		E	22
22	Wash room, mirror, fountain	W	21
23	Wide air duct	S	9
		D	24
24	Large bleak room, rubble, thick dust	U	23
	Get *Bag* from *Cleaner*, **Exam**, **Fix** *Bag*	D	25
	with *Plaster*, **Clean Room** with *Cleaner*.		
25	Power House; **Pull** *Lever*, *Torch* **Off**	U	24
	Main game now begins.		

5.5 A sample mapping grid

Even those with good visual mapping skills can be glad of the occasional
of help - and one such bit of help is a mapping grid designed by my fri
Nic Outterside. The next page shows what it looks like, and you have his
my permission to photocopy it and make whatever personal use of it
help you in your adventure gaming exploits.

5.6 Saves during gameplay

Just before we finish this chapter, I want to say something about saves du
gameplay in an adventure. You should reckon on creating two types of
for saving: one is short-term, and the other a more permanent long-t
record of your progress through the game.

5.6.1 Short-term saves

Short-term saves are a vital safety ingredient when you are about to atte
an action which may have unexpected consequences. The sort of thing I h
in mind includes such activities as pressing a Red (as against any o
colour) button when a choice is given; though you might like to save be
pressing any colour button - it just depends how cautious you want to be.
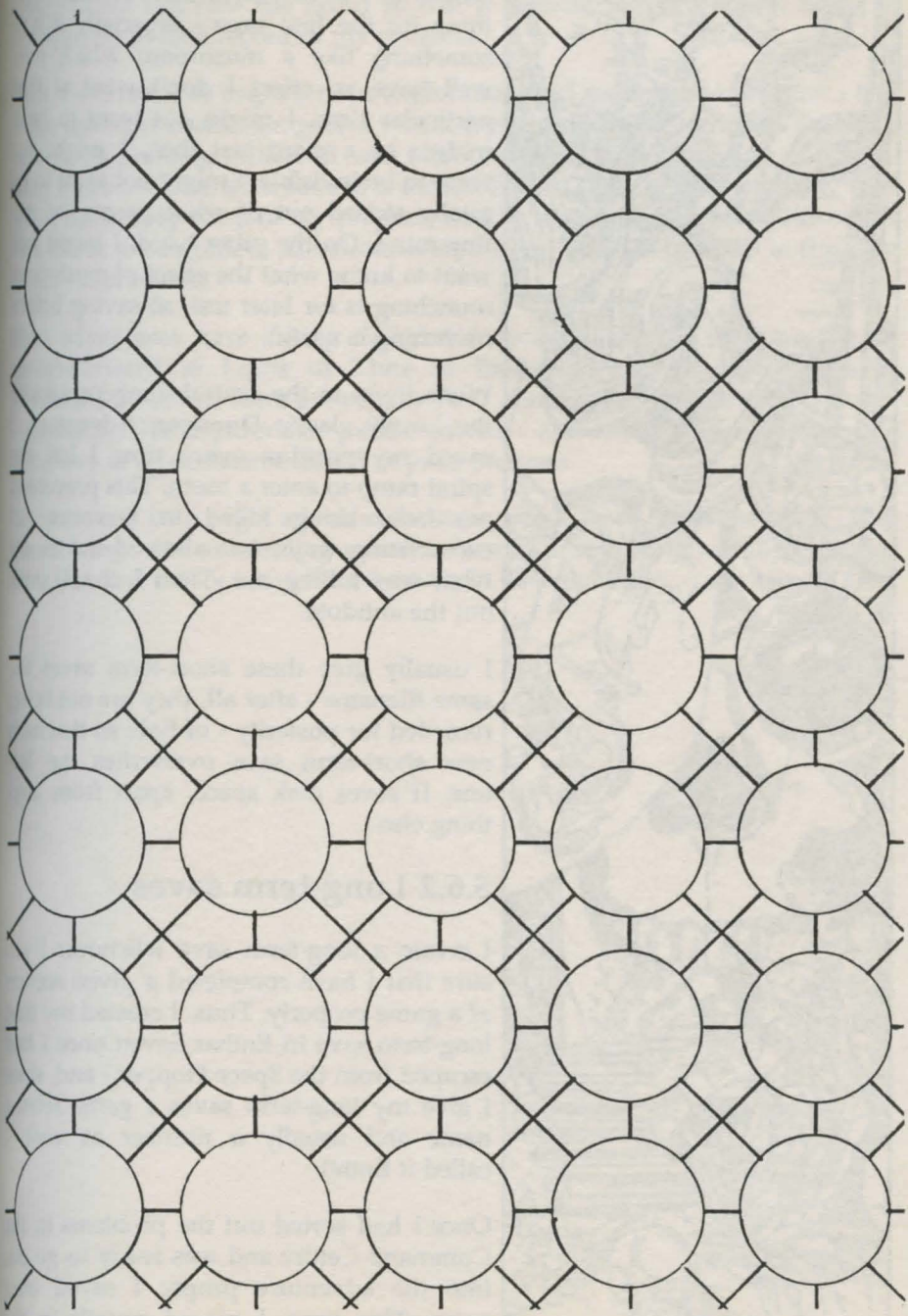
Nic Outterside's mapping grid
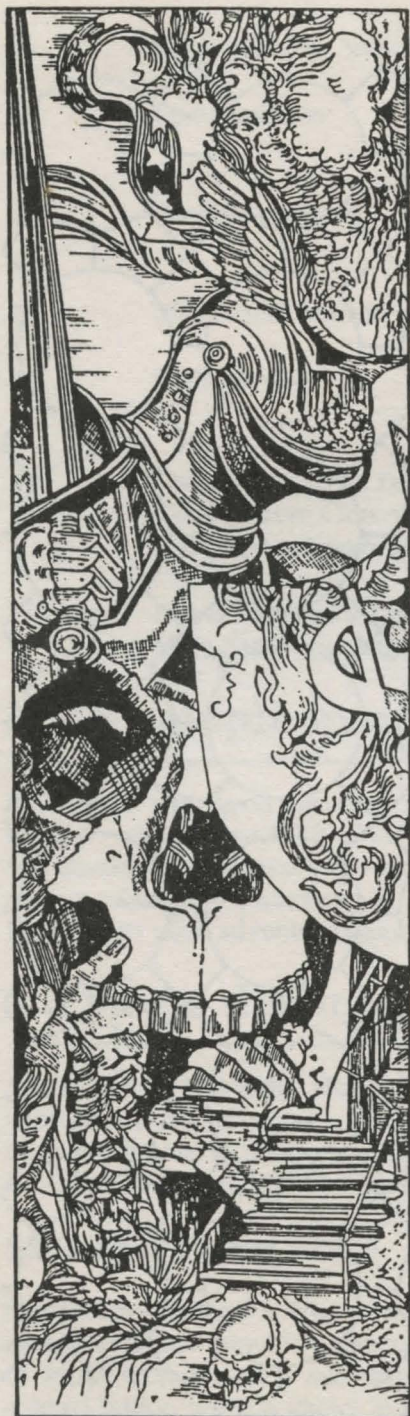
Dungeon Adventure

Similarly, I always save before eating a
thing for the first time - especially if i
something like a mushroom which m
well have an effect I don't want at t
particular time. I might not want to b
midget or a giant just then, I might
want to be invisible, I might not want to
totally stoned out of what passes for
tiny mind. On the other hand, I might
want to know what the effect of mushro
munching is for later use, so saving be
munching is useful.

When I was in the central dungeon area
the Level9 classic **Dungeon Adventur**
saved my position every time I left
spiral ramp to enter a room. This preven
me from being killed in a variety
excruciating ways, but allowed me to
what was killing me. Then I could w
out the antidote.

I usually give these short-term saves
same filename - after all, they are not b
recorded for posterity - of Bob, so that e
new short-term save overwrites the
one. It saves disk space, apart from a
thing else.

5.6.2 Long-term saves

I create a long-term save whenever I
sure that I have completed a given sec
of a game properly. Thus, I created my
long-term save in Enthar Seven once I
escaped from the Space Hopper - and, s
I give my long-term saves a game rel
name and usually a number as we
called it Enth0.

Once I had sorted out the problems in
Command Centre and was ready to go
into the adventure proper I saved o
more. This time, I placed myself in
cylindrical chamber where the keypad

I then called this new file Enth1 so that it replaced the first file in terms of being an up to date record of my progress.

Now I was ready to begin serious exploration, and every time I felt sure I had made some permanent progress I would create a new long-term file. Section 1 entered by pressing button S1 was filed under the name Enth1 as you have seen, and each long-term save of a section had its own specific number. That way I could keep track of my progress and, at the same time, if modifications turned out to be needed, alterations were not too difficult to make in the light of new information.

Most adventures have clearly designated sections, even if they are not so straightforward as **Lords of Time** or **Enthar Seven**. In other types of adventure, however, there are usually clear markers that can be taken note of - something like a particular puzzle solved - and these can be used in the same way as a permanent record of your progress.

Our next task is to begin a look at the many ways there are of mapping - and thus solving - the astounding variety of mazes that have gradually emerged since that first twisty turny little monster in Colossal Cave.

6

Mastering Mazes

6.1 A first encounter
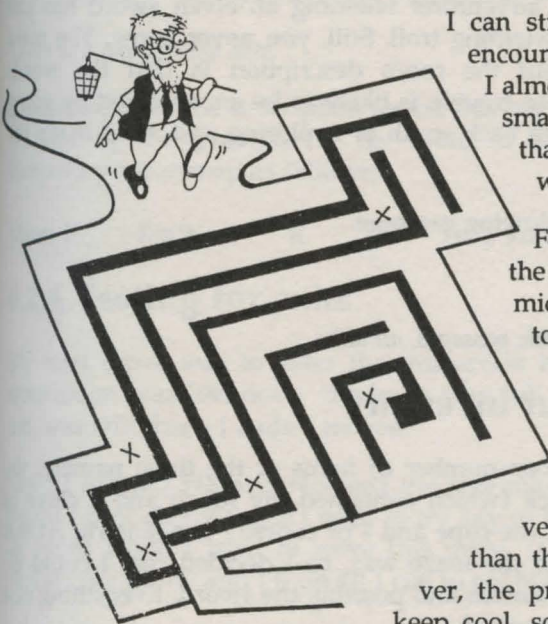
I can still remember the time I first encountered a maze in an adventure. I almost parted with my sanity and smashed the computer since, at that stage, I hadn't a clue how to work out where I was.

For beginners to adventuring, the maze presents the most formidable of problems; you have to have a pretty good idea of what particular style the maze is before you can even begin to tackle it seriously. This is where mazes in modern adventures have become very much more sophisticated than their early counterparts. However, the principle two rules still apply: keep cool, something I conspicuously failed to do that first time, and remember that a solution is possible.

A simple maze

6.2 A simple maze

Let's start with an example of a short and simple maze - in this case take
from **Zork 1**. When you are in the Troll Room, (a location you can encount
almost immediately after going underground), and you have dealt with t
troll, you find that you can obtain a full description of where you are.

6.2.1 Look for warnings

The Troll Room

*This is a small room with passages to the east and south and a forbidding hole leadin
west. Bloodstains and deep scratches (perhaps made by an axe) mar the walls.*

There is an axe here.

As a passing aside, note that the axe might make a useful weapon, though
should also be noted that an adventurer wielding an elven sword has ju
managed to massacre an axe wielding troll. Still, you never know. The ma
thing, though, to notice about the room description is that the wor
forbidding hole suggest that more trouble is likely to be encountered by goi
that way than by either turning back south or exploring east. And that's t
way it proved.

Moving **West** produced the following message.

Maze

This is part of a maze of twisty little passages, all alike.

6.2.2 The value of your inventory

I happened to be carrying a fair number of items at the time; namely, t
sword, the nasty knife, the sack (which contained my lunch and a clove
garlic), a glass bottle of water, the rope and - of course - the lantern. At t
stage, I had no clue how large the maze was, so I decided that I could
without everything except the lantern and possibly the sword. Everything el
could be used as a maze mapping aid.

The very first thing I did before entering that forbidding hole was, of cour
to save my position: I hope I have made it abundantly clear that not to do
would have been folly in the face of that word *forbidding*. Next, havi
arrived in the maze by moving **West**, I tried moving **East** to see whether
not that would land me back in the Troll Room. Some of the nastier maz

don't allow that instant reverse move and so, if you've not saved your position immediately before entering a maze, the attempt to back out of it can render you effectively lost at once.

You can wriggle round this problem by dropping an item from your inventory at once, but this doesn't always work where the larger mazes are concerned for reasons that will be made plain later.

Anyway, having checked that I could safely get out of this first maze location by reversing my initial entry, I then marked it by dropping the knife, and entering the command **Look**.

6.2.3 Checking your surroundings

The description now read:

Maze

This is part of a maze of twisty little passages, all alike.

There is a nasty knife here.

This addition to the description meant that my location was now permanently marked by the presence of the knife. It could now be entered on my temporary maze map as follows:

Maze 1:   *Knife*   E   Troll Room.

6.2.4 Testing for exits

My next move was to enter the instruction NORTH to find that the room description was identical - the knife was still there. I knew therefore that I, too, was still there: I hadn't moved.

Next, I entered **NE** and received the reprimand: *You can't go that way.* That meant I probably wouldn't need to try any of the other diagonal directions as an input while I tried to solve this maze. If any reader knows otherwise, please contact me and I'll do all I can to eat humble pie.

I didn't bother entering **East**, because I knew already that this would land me back in the Troll Room. Instead, I tried two other directions which I was pretty sure could be eliminated, namely **Up** and **Down** - though, as you'll see later, it never does to ignore these two directions permanently where mazes are concerned. In both cases I was told that they were no-go directions. Don't forget, negative information is still valuable.

6.2.5 Proof of a move

The next direction entered, therefore, was **South** and this produced th message.

Maze

This is part of a maze of twisty little passages, all alike.

There was no mention now of a nasty knife - I had moved. It was time t drop something else as a location marker: I chose the rope.

My next move involved attempting to retrace my steps by entering north afte marking my temporary maze map with the additional information. My ma now looked like this.

Maze 1:	*Knife*	E	Troll Room
		S	2
Maze 2:	*Rope*		

6.2.6 Establishing a route

Entering **North** from location 2 produced a no-go message, so I knew I wa dealing with a nasty maze maker (they usually are, it is fair to say) and tha something more subtle would be needed to get me back to location 1. M next input was **East** - I always work methodically clockwise around th points of the compass - and this made the rope vanish. Once again, I knew had moved.

An addition could now be made to the map, and it looked like this.

Maze 1:	*Knife*	E	Troll Room
		S	2
Maze 2:	*Rope*	E	3
Maze 3:	*Lunch*		

I decided that eating could be temporarily out of fashion while I continued t penetrate the depths of this maze, so I didn't mind using my lunch as th next marker. Undaunted by the fact that it didn't work last time, the fir move I made was an attempt to reverse things by entering **West** as command - and this time I found myself back with the rope. Once again th map was updated to look like this.

Maze 1:	*Knife*	E	Troll Room
		S	2

Maze 2:	*Rope*	E	3
Maze 3:	*Lunch*	W	2

I was now in a position to move between two of the locations with confidence, even though I couldn't yet find my way back to the knife and one possible exit from the maze. However, I hadn't actually completed my explorations of location Two; it was time to experiment some more - and so I entered **South**. This turned out to be the very move needed to find the missing link between the first three locations. The map was amended once again to look like this.

Maze 1:	*Knife*	E	Troll Room
		S	2
Maze 2:	*Rope*	E	3
		S	1
Maze 3:	*Lunch*	W	2

It's important to realise at this stage that I hadn't finished with location One; all of my work so far had been with the aim of getting me back there. The spin-off, as far as I was concerned, was the fact that I now could move with confidence between locations One, Two and Three even though my explorations were still very much incomplete. I hadn't a clue how much larger the maze was going to be.

I needed therefore to enter the final direction for location One - **West** - and I found myself in somewhere totally new. It was time to update the faithful map once more and to drop an appropriate marker. Since, in my early days of adventuring, I used to say that I thought mazes stink, I dropped the garlic, risking the possibility that a vampire lurked deep within the maze, waiting to suck the unwary dry. So the map now looked like this.

Maze 1:	*Knife*	E	Troll Room
		S	2
		W	4
Maze 2:	*Rope*	E	3
		S	1

Maze 3:	Lunch	W	2
Maze 4:	Garlic		

The move to a new location meant that, once again, I was going to have to try and find my way home - or at least to a familiar location - and so, plucking up all my courage, I tried yet again to reverse my direction by entering East. I got pitchforked into somewhere new once more but, this time, I didn't need to drop a marker, I decided. Actually, I took a bit of a risk - there could have been more than one location described as a Dead End, in which case a marker could have turned out to be necessary. A further map update was needed, and it looked like this.

Maze 1:	Knife	E	Troll Room
		S	2
		W	4
Maze 2:	Rope	E	3
		S	1
Maze 3:	Lunch	W	2
Maze 4:	Garlic	E	5
Maze 5:	Dead End		

I now had to work out how to leave the Dead End. I tried reversing my direction as usual by entering West, but nothing happened; so I went back to being methodical and tried North first of all and then East. Neither of these produced anything and so South it had to be - and back I was, able to guzzle garlic any time I wanted. I won't bother updating the whole map here, just note that I could now add the successful direction and the location number of the destination onto my rough map.

6.2.7 The final map

Once again it was time for method rather than madness and, as a consequence, I entered North while enjoying the aroma of Garlic. Blow me down if I didn't end up almost cutting myself on the knife in location One. From here on it was just a question of checking every location with untried directions - and my final map looked like the one below.

Maze 1:	Knife	E	Troll Room
		S	2
		W	4
Maze 2:	Rope	E	3
		S	1
Maze 3:	Lunch	N	4
		W	2
Maze 4:	Garlic	N	1

		E	5
Maze 5:	*Dead End*	S	4

I was now in a position to abandon the temporary map and renumber all the locations as I carefully incorporated them into the main, permanent map.

There are, however, a few general comments that need to be made before we look further into this business of mazes. First, there was no treasure there; that is pretty unusual these days. If there had been some kind of treasure, I would have used it as a location marker while I explored the rest of the maze. And only once that was done and I felt that I could move confidently around at will, would I have grabbed the loot and moved on to pastures new.

Next, I have to say that it was a fairly simple maze in that it only had the four main compass directions operative. Add in the diagonals together with Up and Down as permissible entries and you begin to face a formidable foe. Where that happens you have to create a map that is more elaborate.

6.3 Mapping mazes with diagonal exits

This extra elaboration is simply an aid to thorough exploration - you can't always remember if you have tested a movement or not once they multiply a bit - and the one thing to remember is that a calm methodical approach to a maze soon has it screaming for mercy. That, after all, is our aim: we don't want adventure game players screaming in frustration. There is no quick solution to mazes - though it is true to say that any solution always gathers momentum as you proceed further into your explorations.

Lastly, we were lucky, where the **Zork 1** maze was concerned, in that we had enough possessions available to drop something in every location to act as a marker, and still have some over. It's not always like that: the nastier adventures will have a limit on the items you can carry and then design a maze that needs two or more markers to be dropped than you are allowed to carry. We'll deal with those in a moment. First, though, I want to show you how a temporary maze map would look if all directions had been permissible. I'll use the Zork 1 maze map as a template to show the technique needed.

Maze 1:	*Knife*	N	No Go
		NE	No Go
		E	Troll Room
		SE	No Go
		S	2
		SW	No Go

		W	4
		NW	No Go
		U	No Go
		D	No Go
Maze 2:	*Rope*	N	No Go
		NE	No Go
		E	3
		SE	No Go
		S	1
		SW	No Go
		W	No Go
		NW	No Go
		U	No Go
		D	No Go
Maze 3:	*Lunch*	N	4
		NE	No Go
		E	No Go
		SE	No Go
		S	No Go
		SW	No Go
		W	2
		NW	No Go
		U	No Go
		D	No Go
Maze 4:	*Garlic*	N	1
		NE	No Go
		E	5
		SE	No Go
		S	No Go
		SW	No Go
		W	No Go
		NW	No Go
		U	No Go
		D	No Go
Maze 5:	*Dead End*	N	No Go
		NE	No Go
		E	No Go
		SE	No Go
		S	4
		SW	No Go
		W	No Go

NW	No Go
U	No Go
D	No Go

Do remember this is only a template, based on a real map: if the other directions indicated had been available you would obviously have more locations on your map and a lot less No Go entries. However, doing things this way is the only proven technique whereby you can make doubly sure that you haven't missed something out. Murphy's Law says that the one direction you forget will be the very one which either is the way to the treasure, or is the exit from the maze: be warned. Where solving and mapping mazes are concerned there is no such thing as overkill. Now it's time to move on to slightly more advanced mazes.

6.4 A more advanced maze

The first type of maze that deserves the epithet advanced is the one where you have two conditions operating. First, you are strictly limited in the number of items you can carry: let's pose the example of the early Level9 adventures where - as you have seen - the adventurer can only have four items at any one time. Let's add the slight complicating factor of being underground and in the dark.

Basically, this situation means that you can only drop three items, and thus identify three locations, before trouble starts to loom on the horizon. Let's also add the not unusual problem of only being able to make two moves in the dark before you are munched into nothingness by some mangy monster or other. Finally, let's suppose we have a six-roomed maze.

At first sight you might think this combination of circumstances would make the maze unsolvable. That's not the case largely because adventure game writers are sensible people: they might want to make things difficult, particularly for novice adventurers, but they aren't daft. An unsolvable maze means an unsaleable game; if reviewers found what they honestly believed was an unsolvable maze they would very quickly blow the whistle. So, what do we do?

The example I'm going to use is the already mapped maze from **Zork 1** but with two additions: firstly, the limitation on objects carried is three items plus a lamp; secondly, I'm going to add an imaginary location just for the purpose of this particular exercise in solving and mapping mazes.

Before you do anything else at all save your position! This instruction lies at the heart of almost everything we do to minimise frustration. The business of there being a forbidding hole awaiting the unwary should be the trigger for any seasoned adventurer to save - even if it later turns out just to be an attempt to wind us up. A temporary save doesn't take much time and it can (forgive the pun) save a lot of grief.

I am going to assume that we are carrying the knife, rope, garlic and the lamp, and so the first location will look more or less the same as before, though I'm going to start us a bit further into the maze.

Maze 1:	Knife	E	Troll Room
		S	2
Maze 2:	Rope	E	3
Maze 3:	Garlic	W	2

Any further move is going to involve the loss of the lamp, moves in darkness, and thus despair and death since the on-screen message will simply tell you that it's dark and you can see nothing at all. So, what do we do now?

My technique involves trying to find a way back from location Two to location One and so, once the progress has been mapped, you have to return to the saved position just before entering the maze. Go back in, drop the knife as before and move on to location Two, dropping the rope again. Now it is simply a question of testing every direction until you find the one which takes you back to location One.

To digress for a moment, if the sort of maze you are in doesn't have a link back to location One from location Two there's no need to fret; you simply work on finding the route back from location Three to location Two - there's bound to be one - and then use the garlic as a marker to locate what other rooms lie off location One.

Anyway, back to business: in the end you can work out the connecting links between the first three locations, and after that it becomes a matter of trusting your map and pressing on a little deeper. You go back to your saved position, enter the maze and start by marking location One with the knife as before: the rope and the garlic will be used to fulfil a new purpose and your map will now look like this.

Maze 1:	Knife	E	Troll Room
		S	2
Maze 2:		E	3
		S	1
Maze 3:		W	2

Notice that there are now no markers for locations Two and Three, but that we can move between these rooms at will, even if - for the present - we can't do much more. It's time to probe a little deeper.

The next moves involve testing all the exits one by one from location One - and in this case a move west takes us somewhere - until the knife disappears and we drop the garlic and establish location Four. You now have a bit of a dilemma: should you try reversing your steps by moving east or start methodically round the compass? Really it's for you to decide; we already know (since we are using a real maze with my own fictitious additions) that retracing won't work.

However, it's still the policy I would use, and you'd therefore lose the garlic. You would also, in this case, have a ready made marker in the description *Dead End*. This means that you've not emerged into either location Two or Three.

The map now looks like this:

Maze 1:	*Knife*	E	Troll Room
		S	2
		W	4
Maze 2:		E	3
		S	1
Maze 3:		W	2
Maze 4:	*Garlic*	E	5
Maze 5:	*Dead End*		

The next process simply involves finding the way out of location Five; since it's a dead end, we know that there is only one way out and, by using the description as a marker, we still have the rope available if needed. In this case we don't need it yet because the only way out makes the garlic reappear. Still, we have learnt quite a lot just by being able to move between locations Four and Five.

It's now a question of exploring all the exits from location Four, bearing in mind that we can still use the rope as a marker. It's at this stage that I would start the logical moves around the compass, and so my first command from here would be **North** - which lands me back with the knife which means I know exactly where I am. It also means I can go straight back to location Four without any trouble whatsoever.

I now move **South**, since the easterly direction has already been explored, and once again the garlic has gone. I might be in locations Two or Three, or else I might be in a completely new location. Dropping the rope is indicated and the map now looks like this.

Maze 1:	Knife	E	Troll Room
		S	2
		W	4
Maze 2:		E	3
		S	1
Maze 3:		N	4
		W	2
Maze 4:	Garlic	N	1
		E	5
		S	6
Maze 5:	Dead End	S	4
Maze 6:	Rope		

Next we have to try the technique of retracing one's steps to see what happens - and in this case I decided it would work. It is, after all, a purely arbitrary decision, whether the maze is being concocted by a genuine adventure writer, or by someone giving help in solving them. Once more the garlic reappears and this tells us that we aren't in one of the known but unmarked locations. The next move, therefore, is back to location Six to test all exits - and moving west reveals the knife: once again, we know where we are.

Once you have drawn the final map - as detailed below - there is only one concluding test to be carried out. This simply involves exploring the maze without any markers at all. You should be able to visit every single location in turn and find your way out again. Once you have demonstrated that, the maze has yielded up all its secrets - and you'll never be afraid of this kind of maze again.

Maze 1:		E	Troll Room
		S	2
		W	4
Maze 2:		E	3
		S	1
Maze 3:		N	4
		W	2
Maze 4:		N	1
		E	5
		S	6
Maze 5:	Dead End	S	4
Maze 6:		N	4
		W	1

After that, it's just a matter of renumbering the locations as you incorporate the maze into your main map. Next, we'll look at some of the other types of maze that try to frustrate us; the same principle holds good, though; relentless logic and a determination to crack the puzzle are the main weapons in the adventure game player's armoury.

7

More on Mazes

7.1 Grammatically dependent mazes

We are going to move on now to look at another kind of maze, which is at first sight identical to the type of maze we have just dealt with. It's not the same at all - certainly in one crucial aspect - but only careful observation will reveal it for what it truly is.

It can usually be mapped by dropping objects in the way I have already described in the last chapter; but there is another way of mapping it, which can prove very useful if you are only able to carry a very limited number of tools or treasures. This method is also useful if the maze turns out to be one of those nasty variations where, the moment you drop something, a message appears giving the glad tidings that: *A mysterious hole appears in the ground, swallowing your lunch* - or whatever item it was that you dropped.

This sort of maze doesn't reveal its identity at once: I reckon you need to visit at least three locations to be sure of the nature of the beast - and if you are limited to carrying a lamp and three other items, you need to be on the lookout.

The initial message on the screen will look normal enough, and read something like the one below.

You are in a maze of twisty turny little passages all alike.

As you can see, it's hardly different from the maze message in **Zork 1** which stated: *This is part of a maze of twisty little passages, all alike.*

There is, however one very subtle difference - and I can still remember how I mentally kicked myself once the penny dropped. The difference isn't the addition of the adjective turny (though that in a way is a part of the style where this maze is concerned) but an omission. If you look back, you'll see I omitted the comma that was part of the **Zork 1** location description - and that omission is vital.

This type of maze is one that I call grammatically dependent: that is to say, each location is uniquely identified by the grammatical construction of the description - it's a very subtle and, to my mind, fiendishly clever, adaptation of the type of maze we saw in **Zork 1**.

I'll list some of the grammatical variants, just to illustrate what I mean, and then indicate the mapping procedures required.

The original read: *You are in a maze of twisty turny little passages all alike.*

The variant: *You are in a maze of twisty, turny little passages all alike* is designed to escape all but the most eagle eyed adventurer. And part of me says that some of you have abandoned a particular adventure - or even adventure gaming as a pastime - simply because you didn't notice the addition of a comma in the room description. So let me show you a variety of descriptions which may, hopefully, send at least some of you scurrying back to an abandoned game determined this time to grab the maze by the throat until it screams for mercy.

You are in a maze of twisty, turny, little passages all alike.

You are in a maze of turny twisty little passages, all alike.

You are in a maze of little twisty, turny, passages, all alike.

I'm sure you can begin to see how the variations are possible to create - and how the number of these possible variations is very large indeed. For this sort of maze, a cool head and very accurate observation are essential ingredients - otherwise you will never know if you have moved and not have a clue as to where you are.

The mapping technique is not difficult, and (in my opinion, anyway) shows the definite superiority of logical mapping compared with the pictorial one. Just recognise that I am totally biased in favour of the one method and totally incompetent where the other is concerned. That's called objectivity. Anyway, here is what to do.

Maze 1:	*twisty turny little all alike*	N	2
Maze 2:	*little twisty turny, all...*	W	3
Maze 3:	*twisty, little turny, all....*	E	4
Maze 4:	*turny little twisty, all...*	W	3

I'm sure you can see how I use the variants in the description to identify the location. It's a bit of a chore - as I'm the first to confess - but at the end of the exercise, so long as you have been meticulous in your observation and in your mapping, the maze will be forced to yield up its secrets. Once again, you will have conquered - and that's what this is all about. Nobody said adventure gaming was an easy pastime.

7.2 Exit dependent mazes

It's time now to look at another variation on the maze theme - this time one which doesn't need to have things dropped in order for the different locations to be mapped. As always, though, you need to make careful notes. This sort of maze has you lost in a forest, perhaps a bleak heathland or maybe you are wandering through a mountain range. It featured in two adventures for the BBC microcomputer - **Lord of the Rings** and **Twin Kingdom Valley**. I call this kind of maze an exit dependent maze, for reasons which will be obvious in a moment. I'm going to create an imaginary maze in a forest to show how these can be mapped.

Maze 1:   Lost in the forest; paths lie   N
                                            E
                                            W

As always, the moment you discover or suspect you are in a maze, you should immediately save your position. Next, try to get out by reversing the direction you took which landed you in the maze. This isn't always possible, as I've stated, which is why it is absolutely essential to have a saved position in that initial location as a precautionary back-up.

Next, test the first direction given - here it's a move North - and see what happens: in this case, the description reads exactly the same. Don't panic; it simply means that you haven't moved anywhere. You can now annotate the map as follows.
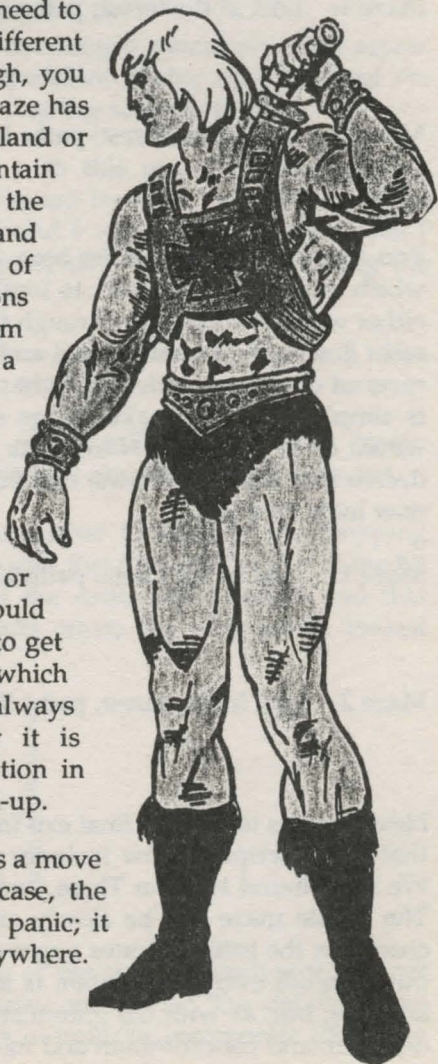
Maze 1:   Lost in the forest; paths lie N   Same
                                         E
                                         W

I use the comment *same* to indicate that the location description was the same
- you could equally well annotate the map to read *No move* or something
similar. The main thing is to establish a clear marker which indicates the
result of the move. Next move, therefore, is **East**. This time, the location
description reads: *You are lost in the forest; paths lie South, Southwest and
Northwest.* So the map should now look like this.

Maze 1:   Lost in the forest; paths lie N   Same
                                         E   2
                                         W

Maze 2:   Lost in the forest; paths lie S
                                         SW
                                         NW

You have a choice of tactics here. Notice that there is no direction indicated
which might lead you back to location One. It means, therefore, that you can
either work methodically through the exits in the order shown, or you can do
what I would normally try - and that is to test the direction closest to a
reversal of the one which brought me here. That quite often works; the author
is simply trying to make things a little harder. My tactic in this example
would be to try going **Northwest**: since this is an imaginary maze, I hereby
decree that success follows, and you land back in location One. So the map
now looks like this.

Maze 1:   Lost in the forest; paths lie N   Same
                                         E   2
                                         W

Maze 2:   Lost in the forest; paths lie S
                                         SW
                                         NW   1

Next move is to test the final exit in location One by moving **West** and noting
that the description now includes exits leading **East South** and **Northwest**.
We have found location Three, and once again it is time to update the map.
The whole maze can be slowly and steadily mapped in this way, since a
change in the exits indicates a move, while no change means you have stayed
put. Because every description is slightly different, there is no need to drop
anything but, as with the grammatical type of description, this kind of maze
does demand concentration and meticulous observation. You can't ever hurry
through the business of mapping mazes.

7.3 Vanishing objects

Now I want to turn to quite another type of maze which I hinted at earlier in the chapter - and it's one where dropping objects will produce a surprise. This time I will use a real example - the maze to be found in Section One of the Robico adventure **Enthar Seven**.

After teleporting from the Command Centre, you make your way down a canyon, up a cliff ledge to a complex of caverns where a maze can be encountered. You certainly know you are in a maze by the description:

The twisting maze of narrow walkways winds confusingly around you. They appear to have been cut somewhat randomly using specialised mining equipment and the parallel layers of rock are now visible. A distant wailing song can be heard.

I can still remember my first encounter with this maze: I wasn't paying proper attention and so missed the clue planted by Robert O'Leary. I riffled through my inventory of things carried, found I was toting a cushion that I had forgotten about, and I promptly dropped it so as to start mapping the maze.

The screen acknowledged that the cushion had been dropped, and then produced an amusing - and at the same time chilling - message.

A Gongafrop (a large Entharian mammal whose culinary habits are famous throughout the galaxy) bounces into the chamber, eats everything and bounces out.

So there I was, minus a cushion, and no further forward in my mapping progress. I read the maze description again and this time took notice of the bit about the distant wailing song. I entered the command **Listen** - and that proved to be the answer, and now I could create the map which looked (eventually) like this.

Maze A1: *Wailing Song loudest*	E	2
Maze A2: *Wailing Song loudest*	SW	3
Maze A3: *Wailing Song loudest*	S	4
Maze A4: *Wailing Song loudest*	S	5
Maze A5: *End of maze A; exits*	N	4
	D	B

Maze B1

Since maze B was an Exit Dependant maze of the sort just dealt with, I'll not bore you with any more details. Of course, once I had the detailed map worked out, I renumbered all the locations in order to incorporate them into

the main map. The only other thing to notice is that this wailing maze had only one exit for each location; and so, once the map was drawn, progress through it was straightforward. Robert got the balance between frustration and fairness just right. We'll look at one or two more mazes of this general type next to show what to look for.

7.4 The jet black maze

One of the earlier - and highly successful - adventures for the BBC Microcomputer was **Castle of Riddles** which, if my memory serves me correctly, was also tied to a competition in that a prize was awarded to the first person to complete it. In **Castle of Riddles** was a Jet Black Maze and dropping things here got you absolutely nowhere.

Providing you had found it, you were equipped with a black rod; waving it in the maze enabled the rod to give out a coloured smoke which varied according to the location you were in. Thus the marker needed to identify the location absolutely was a colour. Things weren't made easier by the fact that several exits led to the same location, but a logical map would look like the one below.

Castle of Riddles

Maze 1:	*Red Smoke*	N	2
		NE	3
		E	4
		SE	3
		S	Alcove
		SW	2
		W	4
		NW	3
Maze 2:	*Orange Smoke*	N	1
		NE	5
		E	3
		SE	5
		S	3
		SW	1
		W	3
		NW	5
Maze 3:	*Yellow Smoke* (Case)	N	1
		NE	2

	E	1
	SE	4
	S	1
	SW	2
	W	2
	NW	4
Maze 4: Green Smoke	N	6
	NE	1
	E	2
	SE	3
	S	2
	SW	1
	W	3
	NW	3
Maze 5: Blue Smoke	N	2
	NE	7
	E	1
	SE	3
	S	4
	SW	4
	W	3
	NW	1
Maze 6: Indigo Smoke (Sculpture)	N	5
	NE	3
	E	4
	SE	1
	S	2
	SW	3
	W	2
	NW	5
Maze 7: Violet Smoke	N	3
	NE	2
	E	1
	SE	4
	S	1
	SW	2
	W	Exit
	NW	4

Now there are certain things to be learned from the way this maze is constructed. Most of all, though, notice how the logical mapping method is the most straightforward, simply because you can't reverse your direction and get back to your previous location. **North** from location One puts you in location Two, **South** from there lands you in location Three - and **North** from Three puts you back in the first location.

Finally, where this maze was concerned, a password was needed to get out and, to demonstrate the best qualities of top class adventures, there were three on offer - each of them being suggested by the kind of maze it was. The first, and perhaps both most obscure and also most logical password was ROYGBIV - this being the word created by the initial letters of the colour sequence Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo and Violet. Simpler and more meaningful passwords involved an act of interpretation; these were RAINBOW or SPECTRUM which, of course, is what the sequence of colours turned out to be.

7.5 Variable mazes

The last maze variant I want to deal with is one where adventure writers got a bit fed up with people who map mazes in adventure games and then publish the maps for all and sundry to benefit from. I'm sure they didn't mean yours truly, since I am normally very reticent about such things, and my usual trading currency is hints rather than full solutions. However, this is what they say...

This maze is different every time you map it (we have become a bit tired of having mazes whose maps are in public circulation), so only map it once.

I can quite understand their feelings - and it's one reason why, in my magazine column, I will only provide full solutions to any adventure once it has been in circulation for at least a year. Often I wait much longer, and then I only provide a solution in the hope that people who have got totally stuck will have another attempt and, once they are out of their current difficulties, will put the solution away for a rainy day while they attempt to solve the game legitimately.

Avon, from Topoligika

Anyway, this particular maze has you lost in a forest - a Shakespearian forest as it happens, the Forest of Arden. The adventure (available on many formats) is called **Avon,** from Topoligika, and is based on the works of the immortal Bard. You don't have to be an expert on Shakespeare scholar to solve it, though if you are aware of some of Will's works, there is no doubt that this helps.

Those who are familiar with the play *As You Like It* will know that in it there is a delectable character by the name of Rosalind, and that some trees in the forest bear notices with her name. That is the mapping clue and, provided you have taken due notice of your surroundings, is therefore the guide to a successful solution. The point is that every maze provides some sort of a clue as to how it may be solved - but the order of the day is nevertheless invariable: acute observation and meticulous attention to detail are the surest pathways to victory.

We are next going to look at other sorts of puzzle which require a little explanation as to how they may best be overcome - and again, I shall draw my examples from those puzzles which had me back against the ropes time and time again in my early days as an adventurer.

Puzzles Galore

At the heart of all good adventures lie various puzzles, designed to tease and entertain the player as he or she attempts to work through the game to a successful conclusion. The simplest of these puzzles are mazes, and we've dealt with those. So now it's time to look at some of the other types of brain-teaser which are often encountered in one form or another.

8.1 Random exits

8.1.1 Bedquilt

I can still remember my original feeling of utter bafflement when I encountered a very odd location in the implementation of **Colossal Cave** offered by the Level9 team. It had exits in all directions but each time you tried to move **North**, you ended up in a different place – and the same was true for almost every other direction that was tried.

It took me a little while to realise that things weren't quite as bad as they seemed, and that a random element was at work which sent you to a fairly limited number of destinations. However, this area of the game still required some hard work, not unlike that needed to solve mazes, so we'll look at this in some detail. The name of the location was Bedquilt, though there was nothing restful or comforting about the place at all; it was more like the adventuring equivalent of a bed of nails.

Bedquilt was described as *a long East-West passage with exits in many directions* and I reached it by travelling Northeast from the Cheese Room and, at first – as I have just hinted, I was utterly baffled. I had already explored some of the other exits from the Cheese Room, and this is just as well because it meant that I knew something of the general surroundings. This was to prove most helpful as I started to tackle the Bedquilt problem in earnest.

Because Bedquilt was described as an East-West passage, my first move was **West**, just to see if I got back to the Cheese Room; you will remember that I had gone Northeast to reach Bedquilt, and I felt that the same technique used in mazes would prove useful. I did arrive back in the Cheese Room, so off I went again to Bedquilt and this time headed East in order to leave by the far end.

I now found myself in *a Complex Junction with passages from the North, East and West, a hole in the ceiling and a salty smell from the North*. Since I was aiming to explore Bedquilt at this stage, rather than head deeper into the adventure, I once again retraced my steps **West**. So far everything was pretty normal but it didn't stay that way for very long.

Purely on the basis of being logical, I next tried moving **North** and found myself in *a large low room with exits North, Southeast and Southwest*. Once more I tried to retrace my steps to Bedquilt – and the nightmare started. First choice was Southeast, but that took me to the *Oriental Room with a Ming Vase and exits Southeast, North and West*. Since **West** was the nearest thing to reversing my steps, I tried that and got safely back from the Oriental Room to the large low room.

Off I went Southwest and ended up in *a twisting corridor with exits Down and North*. **North** from the corridor led me to *a rickety bridge* with a Troll demanding payment, and it turned out to be the move **Down** which landed me back in the large low room. There was only one exit left – the unlikeliest of all – **North**. That took me to *a dead end crawl*. Where on earth had Bedquilt gone? I was at a complete and utter loss and, since I'd not expected any foul play, I hadn't saved my position.

It now became a question of careful exploration, making copious notes, and hoping that I would at some point find myself in a location I recognised. I went back to the Oriental Room and tried moving **Southeast** – and struck gold at once. I found myself back in the Cheese Room. The first thing I did was to make a temporary save so that, if I got hopelessly lost, I could at least start exploring again from a known location.

I made my way back to Bedquilt and once again entered **North** as the desired direction; this was simply to see if I could find my way back again, I still had no suspicion as to how nasty this place really was.

This time I found myself back in the complex junction with the salty smell – and you'll remember that this location could be reached by going **East** in Bedquilt. It was at this stage that the penny began to drop and I realised that a fair old bit of hard work lay ahead. At least this time getting back to Bedquilt was dead easy.

Off I set **North** for a third time and found myself in a place called *the Shell Room* – and there was a clam there, too. Since I was exploring, I didn't bother doing anything except make a note that the clam would be worth prising open to see if anything lay inside. Old hands at this game will know that there was a pearl to be found.

Going **South** from here got me to the complex junction and the salty smell and so it was an easy matter to retrace my steps to Bedquilt. Things were beginning to improve. Off I set, **North** once again, and found myself in *a large low circular room with exits blocked to the East and West but explorable North, South and Up.* **South** (the reverse attempt as usual) took me to *the west end of the Two Pit Room containing exits West and Down.* I began to feel I was back in the mire again as I tried going westwards from this new place.

I was pleased to find myself back in the large low circular room, and so this time I opted for going **North** – and back I landed in Bedquilt. I think you can begin to see the technique employed now, and therefore what I'm going to do is give you my map of the area all around Bedquilt so that you can see how it turned out. If you follow my early comments by tracing through the map you'll soon see how I explored all the available exits, did some checking and, once I was absolutely sure I had found them all, moved on deeper into the adventure. Once again, I just don't see how pictorial mapping could have coped with this particular type of puzzle. Anyway, enough of bragging, take a good look at the map that follows.

ROOM	DESCRIPTION	MOVE	RESULT
46	Tall E-W Canyon; narrow chink	N	48
		E	44
		W	47
47	Boulders (dead end)	E	46
48	Cheese Room; Passages W, E	W	49
	& NE (?Others?)	E	50
		3x S	46

		3x NW	75
	N, U, D, SW, SE no go	NE	51
49	Two Pit Room; E pit descendable	D	52
	Hole above W pit out of easy	E	48
	reach. Path bypasses pits to	W	53
	connect passages E & W		
50	Soft Room; *Pillow* no exits bar	W	48
51	Bedquilt; long E-W passage	W	48*
	Fixed moves E & W	E	64*
	Other directions	N(i),S(iii)	73
	Random results	N(ii)	79
		N(iii)	65
		N(iv)	54
		N(v),SW(i)	49
		S(ii)	48*
		N(vi)	64*
52	East Pit; Oil well	U	49
53	West end of two pit room	W	54
		D	59
54	Large low circular room	U	61
	E-W passages blocked	N	51
	Low passages N & S	S	53
55	Large room knee deep in dust	E	56
	Passage E, hole D to junction	D	64
56	Dirty broken passage; low crawl	E	57
	Large passage	W	55
	Hole in ceiling	U	36
57	Small climbable pit; crawl W	D	58
58	Bottom of pit 6" *icy water*	U	57
59	Bottom of W pit;	U	53
	Wilting seedling (water x 2)	Climb	87
60	Junction: S end of N-S canyon &	E	41
	W end of E-W canyon	N	61

Dragon (Kill) & *Carpet*

61	Wide N-S Canyon, mist,	D	54
	Collapsed floor	S	60
		N	62
62	Huge N-S Canyon; Mist from N	S	61
	Mirror above, windows	N	63
63	Underground reservoir, sole exit	S	62
64	Complex junction,	N	65
	Passages from N E & W	E	69
	Hole in ceiling, salty smell N	W	51
		U	55
65	Shell room; passages D S & U	S	64
	Clam (*Trident* gets *Oyster*)	D	66
		U	68
66	Steeply sloping corridor	U	65
	Sharp walls	D	67
67	Cul-de-sac & broken shells	U	66
68	Arched hall, collapsed ceiling	D	65
69	Ante-room; passages E W & U	U	64
	"Caves under construction"	E	70
	Spelunkers Gazette "Don't go W"	W	51
70	Witt's End (maze) to get out	S & S	69
71	E end of v long hall; low crawl	E	72
	Small hole N	N	42
72	W end of Hall of Mists low crawl	N	104
	Little passage S	E	104
		S	103
		W	71
73	Large low room	N	74
		SE	75
		SW	83

74	Dead end crawl	S	73
75	Oriental Room; *Ming Vase*	SE	48
		N	76
		W	73

You should be able to work your way through my explorations from this
map. It may just be worth mentioning that I used the direction **North** from
Bedquilt almost exclusively: this was because I wanted to test the random
factor as exhaustively as possible. Once I was sure I had found all the exit
locations, I then used other directions as a check – some, but not all, of these
are indicated on the map.

8.1.2 The Carousel Room

There is a similar type of puzzle in the adventure
Zork 2. The Carousel Room has eight exits, and
the room description warns of impending trouble
by stating: *You're not sure which direction is which.*
This room is very disorienting.

The major differences between the Carousel
Room and Bedquilt are that you can always get
back to the Carousel Room without any bother
from whichever location you end up in – it's just
one move away; and because the Zork series of

The Carousel Room

adventures employ the device of only giving a
full description of the location the first time you get there, mapping the new
places is relatively easy.

The technique is just the same as that described for Bedquilt – again, I used
the command **North** until I had exhausted all possibilities, and then double
checked by using another direction several times until I was sure that there
were indeed only eight exits to be found in the Carousel Room.

8.2 One-way exits

Another style of brain teaser which is encountered from time to time, is that
incorporating one-way exits – a variant on the maze and the random exit
puzzle as shown in the last example. Once again it is important to keep a cool
head and to start a damage limitation exercise as soon as you realise what has
happened. It's fairly rare for this type of puzzle to be given any kind of prior
warning, and so it's just about impossible to anticipate: that means there is
little or no chance of saving your position before going through a one-way

exit. Instead, you have to make a methodical survey of all future locations, until you arrive back at a place you recognise as being one before the one way exit was encountered; rest assured, it will turn up eventually.

The first time I came across this type of puzzle was in the second of the adventures incorporated in the **Time and Magik** trilogy – **Red Moon**. This game, incidentally, plunged me into computing journalism since I made the mistake of solving it before *Alice* the then resident adventure columnist of The Micro User. I offered *her* a solution, was asked to write a review, and when Alice decided to retire to academe I was invited to succeed her.

8.2.1 Red Moon

Anyway, the map below says everything about the technique required if you follow the moves carefully. Once again a logical methodology works wonders.

ROOM	DESCRIPTION		EXIT	RESULT
029	Webby junction	Low crawl	S	030
		Entrance cavern	NW	026
		Steep stairway	D	044
030	Low crawl	Webby junction	N	029
		ONE WAY *door*	E	031
031	Dormitory cavern	Secret bedroom	E	032
		Forge	W	035
032	Secret bedroom	Stairway	SE	033
		Dormitory cavern	W	031
033	Long stairway	Recess	N	034
	Mushroom (045)	Secret bedroom	NW	032
034	Recess	Stairway	S	033
		Well bottom	D	181
035	Giant forge	Dormitory cavern	E	031
	Blacksmith	Secret canyon	SE	036
	Sword (see 025)	Corridor arches	W	038
	Fire (see *Fan*)	Chimney	U	205
036	Secret canyon	Windy cave	S	037
		Forge	NW	035
037	Windy cave *Flask*	Sole exit	E	036
038	Corridor arches	Forge	E	035
		Dusty cave	S	039
039	Dusty cave	Corridor arches	N	038
		Windy store room	S	040
040	Windy store room	Sole exit	N	039
	Hill of beans (**examine**)	ONE WAY	D	041

The main thing to notice – and take reassurance from – is that I had to go through two one-way exits before I got back into familiar surroundings. I learned quite a lot in the process, however; and also (though I didn't know it at the time) found the route which led to the conclusion of the adventure.

The other thing worth noting is that, if I had not examined the hill of beans, I would not have found the second of the two one-way exits and would have been stuck. Again, I can't emphasise too much the need there is for the closest examination of one's surroundings. You will often encounter a great many things that are just scenery; but if you omit the process, you can bet your bottom dollar you'll miss something that turns out to be vital to the successful completion of the adventure.

8.2.2 Zork 1

A simpler version of the one-way exit ploy was to be found in the early locations of **Zork 1**; and in this case, the clues were there for all to read – if you knew what to look for.

My suspicions were first aroused when I entered the house, came to the kitchen and found that part of the location description read: *A dark chimney leads down...*

Once I had established my general whereabouts, and had obtained a light source, I took a closer look at that chimney. Naturally, I saved my current position before doing anything, and then entered the instruction: Down. Those of you familiar with the game will know that the message in response is: *Only Santa Claus climbs down chimneys*.

Now I took that to be a clue rather than a slick response to what I had tried to do, and so I began to think that there had to be a way of climbing UP the chimney from somewhere else. In other words, somewhere would have a one-way exit which led to the kitchen. That knowledge was to prove useful and also have a calming effect on me when I started exploring further.

Earlier in this book, when I dealt with the opening moves in **Zork 1**, I didn't take you underground; but now I want to indicate what a little exploring produced, so as to show how certain factors help to dictate our procedures.

You will remember that the living room contained a trap door which was concealed by a carpet. Opening this trap door resulted in the message: *The door reluctantly opens to reveal a rickety staircase descending into darkness.* Again, there were a couple of important clues here; first, going down should be a move that could be accomplished safely without the help of extra equipment such as a rope; second, if I hadn't yet obtained a light source, now was the time to do something about it.

Since I had the brass lantern already, entering the instruction **Down** was an option I could readily entertain – though only after saving my position first. I already knew I wasn't Santa Claus, but I might be easily capable of breaking my neck if the staircase gave way and hurled me into the depths. In adventuring, caution always pays.

So, down I went – and encountered the following message: *The trap door crashes shut, and you hear someone barring it.*

Since I had taken the precaution of lighting the lantern before even thinking of going down into the darkness, I had no message about being eaten by a grue. Instead I saw the following:

Cellar

You are in a dark and damp cellar with a narrow passageway leading north, and a crawlway to the south. On the west is the bottom of a steep metal ramp which is unclimbable.

It was time to take stock. I knew there was no way of getting back up to the living room, and that another route had to be found. I also had to consider what the message about the metal ramp meant – did the ladder join the ramp, or was the ramp yet another clue about a one way exit from somewhere else? It was clear that the first priority was to find a way back to the house if at all possible. Other things could wait.

Because of that, I ignored the message about my sword glowing with a faint blue light, even though I was as certain as could be that it indicated the fact that an enemy was somewhere in the middle distance. I would have expected the sword to glow brightly if an enemy were nearby.

Purely at random, I entered the direction **South** – and found that my sword was no longer glowing: the enemy was clearly too far away to detect. I was at the east edge of a chasm and could continue east – so I did, and found myself

in an art gallery which had been vandalised. There was some consolation in the form of a single painting left and (if the description was to be believed) it was of unparalleled beauty. This clearly was a valuable treasure that needed depositing in the trophy case.

Because I was in a mood for experimentation, I moved out of the Gallery and then went back again: to this day I don't know why. However, when I went back I found a new message which read: *Fortunately, there is still one chance for you to be a vandal, for on the far wall is a painting of unparalleled beauty.*

There was a move counter at work here, that much was evident, and the message was pretty clear: either I grabbed that painting at once, or I risked losing it. Being the sort of person I am, I went away again and proved the point. No, I'm not a masochist – I just like to know. That, if you like, is why I save my position on a temporary basis pretty frequently. Having established what I needed to know, I went quickly back to the sitting room via my saved position, dived down the trap door again, made my way to the Gallery and grabbed that painting.

After that, I went north for the simple reason that this direction was the only one to offer pastures new. I was, after all, still on the search for a way back home to the kitchen if it could be found. That move took me into the artist's studio and a long message which read as follows.

This appears to have been an artist's studio. The walls and floors are splattered with paints of 69 different colors. Strangely enough, nothing of value is hanging here. At the south end of the room is an open door (also covered with paint). A dark and narrow chimney leads up from a fireplace; although you might be able to get up it, it seems unlikely that you could get down.

There was also some information about a piece of paper which turned out to be another message of congratulations for being so clever as to obtain Zork 1 – and I wouldn't quarrel with that in any way. However, I was much more interested in that chimney: to my mind, it had distinct possibilities.

I started to experiment, and soon found that I couldn't climb up that chimney easily: I was going to have to discard a lot of items. In view of the fact that I still wasn't sure that I knew where I would end up, I discarded an item, saved my position and only then tried to climb up the chimney. That way I was always safe – it didn't really matter where I ended up – I could always get back to the studio.

As it happened I was allowed to carry the picture and the lamp; nothing more – and again that gave me a very helpful clue as to future tactics. When I eventually scaled the chimney, I landed safely in the kitchen, and so I was able to deposit the picture in the trophy case, and then make my way back to the artist's studio and retrieve all my other equipment prior to exploring further locations. I had learned a great deal.

8.3 Invisible and secret exits

While on the matter of odd exits, you should always be on the lookout for invisible or secret exits in adventures. I mentioned early on that a possible clue to the presence of hidden exits may be contained in a location description which includes something like the following formula: *Visible exits are...* However, sometimes that is nothing more than a standard room description.
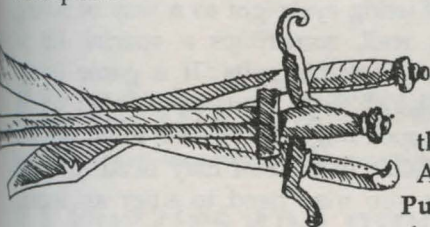
Whenever you encounter a room which is panelled, don't forget to have a good thump at the walls to see if there is anything that sounds hollow. Also try using the instructions **Press**, **Push** and the like. If you encounter any form of decoration – bosses, carved roses, coats of arms – try every means you can think of to manipulate them using the verbs **Twist, Turn, Pull** as well as **Press** and **Push** and any other instruction that occurs to you. Don't forget, even in this day of sophisticated adventures, some game writers have a pretty poor command of language. Sometimes I've needed a thesaurus to help me find the right words needed.

8.3.1 Zork 3

An interesting way of revealing a hidden exit was used in the last part of the Zork Trilogy. In a location called the Engravings Room was a sleeping man. After a while I decided it was safe to wake him and it became clear that he was waiting for something, but I couldn't make out what. Eventually he went back to sleep and I continued on my explorations.

I wandered around various places, and eventually came across a piece of discarded bread. I took it, naturally, because it is an invariable practice of mine in an adventure to take everything I come across, in the belief that it will prove useful at some point. A little later, I encountered a menacing figure who began to inflict damage on me. I backed off, only to find I was being followed.

Retreating faster still, I wondered if the sleeping man could be persuaded to defend me should my pursuer keep up the chase. I therefore made my way as fast as possible back to the Engravings Room and offered him my sword. He refused this but indicated an interest in the bread I was carrying, which turned out to be waybread – an elvish product designed to give strength to weary travellers, as all fans of Lord of the Rings will know.

If that was what he wanted, it was perfectly acceptable to me, so I handed it over and received some advice; I also found that a previously hidden door was now outlined in the north wall of the room. You never know what the result of a little trading will be in adventures: I certainly make it a practice to try bartering before battering when I come across a character in an adventure. Only if someone attacks me first do I resort to violence.

8.3.2 Seeing aids

I gave the example earlier in this book of using eyebright as a way of seeing in the dark; well, sometimes a special aid is needed to see invisible exits. If a game incorporates magic of any kind, there's a strong chance that a spell might be just the thing needed to reveal invisible exits. You may need to wave something or you may need to utter an incantation.
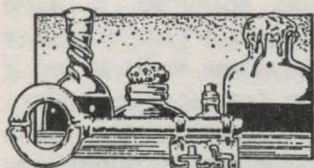
Whatever you do, particularly if you are stuck and can seem to make no further progress, don't give up trying everything that occurs to you. If all else fails, go back to the very beginning of the adventure and check every word of the location descriptions and double check that you have examined everything and searched everywhere.

8.4 Levers

My last piece of advice for this chapter is to remind you that levers which can be pushed or pulled quite often will have an effect in a completely different location from the one where the lever itself has been found. If you get the message *Nothing seems to happen* or even no message at all other than an acknowledgement that the lever or button or whatever has been manipulated, don't despair.

What you should set about doing now, is to explore every nearby location to see if the description has changed in any way, because sometimes the lever will have opened an exit that was previously hidden. A useful motto for adventurers is: *never take anything for granted*.

9

More on Puzzles

9.1 Puzzles and problems – definition

It may sound daft, but I sometimes categorise the challenges we meet in adventures into puzzles and problems. For me, a problem is a situation where I have to work out a procedure very quickly, often employing the data and equipment that are to be found in the immediate locality. A puzzle, on the other hand, is something much more lengthy, and it may well involve quite a lot of travelling around before the thing is properly unravelled.

I'm going to give a few examples of both types so that you can see the difference – as I understand it, anyway – between them, and the type of thinking that is required to overcome them.

9.2 An example puzzle: the Goblins' Cave

One of the adventure games that I receive a great many calls for help over is one for the BBC Microcomputer among others – **The Hobbit**. It had a few bugs, but it was vastly entertaining. Certainly it was well worth buying and persevering with. So far as BBC adventures were concerned, it was one of the earliest games to be illustrated, and the graphics were excellent.

The situation which prompted most calls for help was when you found yourself underground – beneath the Misty Mountains in fact – and were captured by the nasty goblins. This part of the adventure stuck pretty closely to Tolkein's book, so the player had no way of avoiding this section and continuing to the end with any real success, because it was here that the precious Ring was to be found.

The trouble was that, once underground, the chances of being captured by a noxious goblin were very high indeed, even though certain types of goblin would leave you alone. On capture, you ended up in a dungeon with a window which was situated too high up to be climbed through; you were, after all, cast in the role of a hobbit – a person of great worth, but small stature.

In this adventure – like the book of the same name – you had companions. These were not as many as the book depicted, but the two chief characters were included – Gandalf the Wizard and Thorin the Dwarf.

I think I am right in saying that Melbourne House were just about the first software house to produce a parser with a relatively high degree of sophistication enabling the player to interact with characters in the game. You could interrogate them and learn a great deal of helpful information. This, of course, is quite common now – but I think they must have been one of the pioneers: no wonder the game contained some bugs. The parser system was christened with the title Inglish – and a real step forward it was.

Another innovation that made **The Hobbit** somewhat different, for BBC adventurers at least, was the pseudo independence of some characters in the game. We moved a distinct step forward from the giant in **Twin Kingdom Valley** who had an insatiable lust for grabbing things – particularly weapons,

This could be a confounded nuisance, even though the giant was friendly and would see off any inimical characters encountered while he was in your company – provided he could keep up with you, since his motto (even after being restored to full health and vigour) seemed to be "Faint, yet pursuing".

The characters in **The Hobbit** had far more independence than that written into their job specifications, and they would go shooting off into the wide blue yonder at a moment's notice. They would also co-operate with you if the fancy took them, but they were just as likely to prove recalcitrant unless – or so it seemed to me – you asked them repeatedly for help in a suitably grovelling and servile manner. I began to believe that the word "Please" worked wonders, in the same way as I started to insert the adverb "softly" into every instruction when attempting to negotiate the underground caverns occupied by those inhospitable goblins.

On capture, therefore, you had two characters roaming around apart from yourself; these were friendly, stronger and bigger than yourself, and were reckoned to be biddable on the whole – and this was the scenario for one of the major puzzles in **The Hobbit**.

Moving further into the puzzle, cast as Bilbo, you would find yourself dumped in the dungeon possessing the elven dagger Sting for use as a sword and – depending on how far you had explored – perhaps the precious Ring. The dungeon floor was sandy, and the sand could be dug aside to reveal a trapdoor; but as Bilbo, while you were able to summon sufficient strength to smash the trapdoor with the sword, you were too small to open and climb out through the window. What was to be done?

The trick was to wait patiently until Gandalf or Thorin – and preferably both – turned up. Thorin had an irritating habit of sitting down and singing about gold and this led many a frustrated player into homicide (or whatever the dwarvish equivalent is). That was a pity, because without Thorin it was impossible to gain entry to Smaug's lair via the back door for reasons that will be plain in a moment. So, even though I was vastly irritated by him, I bided my time and finally let the dragon roast Thorin when his usefulness was at an end.

Once the trapdoor was smashed a small key was revealed – and this turned out to be the long lost property of Thorin's family. Thorin, once he turned up on the scene, grabbed the key pretty quickly – and he never once said "please". Furthermore, only he could be persuaded to use it later on to unlock the back door to the caverns where Smaug guarded his ill gotten gains. That's why it was important to keep the tubby little fellow alive and singing, even when you would have given anything for the privilege of throttling him slowly.

The next part of the puzzle tended to take much longer. I always tried to get Gandalf to do the work if I could. It was a question of asking Gandalf to open the window in the dungeon, getting him to carry you, and then persuading him to climb through the window and so get you out. Once that was successfully accomplished, you had to ask him to drop you again so that you could resume independent movement. The problem was that – as often as not – a goblin of the arresting kind was lurking nearby and you would then be thrown into the dungeon once more.

There were two ways of overcoming this. The first was to make sure that you had got hold of the precious Ring as soon as possible. This could only really be done by painstakingly mapping the Goblins' caverns and, for me, this involved saving my position just before entering the caverns and then not minding the fact that I got captured. I would then go back and continue explorations until I was captured once more.

I would also save my position once I had made a little progress and then I could restart further in. As soon as I had the Ring I was then able to wear it and so escape notice. However, when I did it for the sake of this book, my BBC Micro decided to overheat and hang up from time to time, and I found that even more saves were needed to complete the detailed map.

You should note, however, that there was no real point in wearing the Ring, even if you come across it quickly, until you had been imprisoned and Thorin had got his grandad's key. Similarly, it is important to notice that the Ring has a habit of slipping off your finger after a while, and that the first you'll know about it is when you get clapped in irons once more. The only antidote to this is to repeat the instruction **Wear Ring** every four or five moves. This ensures continued invisibility.

For the sake of any reader who is still stuck in this part of the adventure, below is a map of the Goblins' Caverns, together with a note of my saves and the location of the Ring – it might just get some of you going again. For the record, it took about two hours' work to map the Goblins' Caverns which were (as you'll see) an exit-dependent maze. Careful students might even be able to work out where the computer hung up on me!

ROOM	DESCRIPTION	MOVE	RESULT
01	Narrow place, drop into deep	E	x
Save1	Valley; overhanging rock	W	x
		N	02
02	Fair sized cave, comfortable		
	nooks. If insignificant crack		
	open......	D	03

03	Deep dark stuffy passage in	S	17
	heart of Mountains.	NE	12
		Capture	04
04	Small and dank dungeon, Door	N	06
	Sandy floor (Dig), Window	W	05
05	Low roughly made passage	SW	06
Save2		SE	08
06	Big cavern, great fire, torches	D	07
		NE	05
	Goblins' door	SE	04
07	Deep Dark Stuffy Passage	UP	06
		W	11
		N	12
08	Deep Dark Stuffy Passage	UP	09
Save3		N	10
		E	12
09	Dp Dk St Pass	NW	11
		W	16
		SW	08
10	Dp Dk St Pass	SW	06
		SE	08
11	DDSP	N	09
		SE	07
		E	23
12	DDSP	SE	19
		E	03
		S	07
		UP	13
13	DDSP	D	12
		S	14
14	DDSP	SE	15
		N	13
		NW	22

15	DDSP *Ring*	N	16
Save4	(*Ring* worn)	NW	14
16	DDSP	D	17
		SE	20
		S	09
		SW	21
17	DDSP	N	03
		D	18
		U	16
18	DDSP	U	17
19	DDSP	E	15
20	DDSP	S	21
		NE	16
		SW	15
		W	14
21	Brink of underground lake	N	20
22	DDSP	SW	14
23	Large cavern lit by natural light	W	06
Save5		N	06
		S	06
		E	06
		SE	06
		SW	06
		D	06
		NE	11
		NW	06
	Goblins' back door (**Open** *Door*)	U	Safety!

There are three things worth noting as you work your way through this map. First, don't think that only those stuck in **The Hobbit** will benefit from studying it, the technique is the same for quite a number of adventures where exit-dependent mazes are encountered.

Second, Murphy's Law operated when I tried to map this maze for you, and I was dealt just about the worst hand possible – even allowing for a computer that decided to hang up every twenty minutes or thereabouts. So, whatever you do, it is imperative that you plod on: logic allied to persistence does win

in the end. Just say to yourself, "I can defeat this problem, even though it may take time".

Finally, it shows the importance of temporarily saving your position during an adventure, because it was only by means of these temporary saves that I was able to move steadily through the maze and so make progress. If I had been playing the game seriously, instead of merely going through it for the sake of this book, (I seem to have mislaid my detailed maps) I would make the save just before entering the Goblins' Caverns a permanent save and the one just before leaving – save5 – permanent as well, since those two locations are important markers for one's progress through the adventure.

Now, by way of contrast, I want to deal with a problem: it's one that had me scratching my head for quite a while before I gave up completely and let the problem solve itself!

9.3 An example problem: the Sword in the Stone

At the beginning of **Zork 3** you are confronted with an elvish sword. Instead of it lying around conveniently waiting to be picked up, as it was in the first two parts of the trilogy, it's stuck into a stone. That didn't worry me particularly, after all, adventurers are always cast in the heroic mould, and I'd always fancied myself as the arthurian type. So, nothing daunted, I approached the elvish sword and pulled, expecting it to come free at once. It did nothing of the sort, and I rapidly became crestfallen as it frustrated every effort to drag it free.
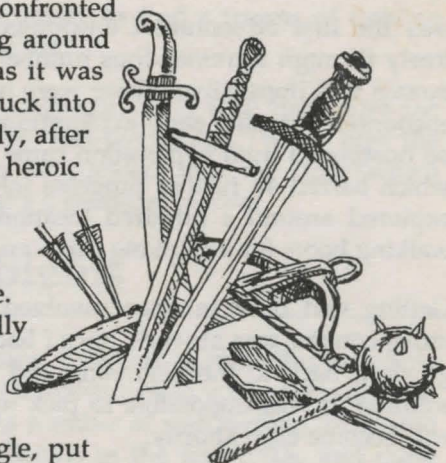
In the end I gave up the unequal struggle, put the problem on a mental back burner and wandered off to explore my surroundings. After a while I encountered a malevolent entity and lo and behold there was a brightly shining elvish sword in my hand. It had come to me in my hour of need. When I had a moment, I went back to check that my sword was, in fact, the sword from the stone – and it was, for the stone now contained nothing. I wonder how many of you behaved in the same way that I did.

9.4 A very long chaining puzzle
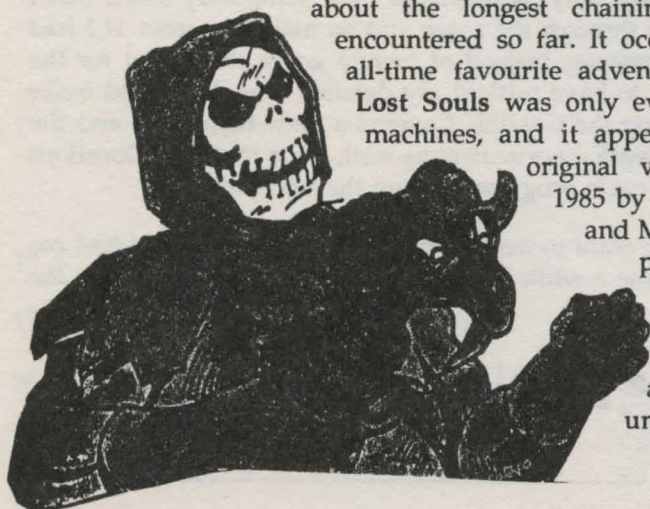
Now, by contrast, I want to give an account of just about the longest chaining puzzle that I have encountered so far. It occurs in what rates as an all-time favourite adventure for me. **Village of Lost Souls** was only ever issued for the Acorn machines, and it appeared in two forms. The original version was released in 1985 by authors Glenn McCauley and Martin Moore who in their partnership went by the name of Magus, and then a revised and enhanced version appeared two years later under the Robico badge.

Set in mediaeval times, Village of Lost Souls was the first adventure I encountered which allowed the player to move freely through a tremendous number of locations before the need to solve a puzzle was imperative. There were quite a number of puzzles and problems encountered during early explorations but they were all of the sort that could be postponed until exploration came to an end. I finally encountered a door which barred all further progress into the adventure, but by this time I had explored around a hundred locations. It was time to exchange my mental walking boots for a thinking cap – and what fun I had.

Getting that door to open involved quite a number of steps and, since a move-counter was at work, once I had finished my early explorations I had to go right back to the beginning and start the business of creating a serious solution. It was impossible to pick up at a saved position for reasons which will become clear shortly.

The initial difficulty was posed by a horde of yapping curs who dogged my footsteps making any reasonable progress wellnigh impossible. They needed bribing with some hams which were located in a cottage loft.

As soon as that nuisance abated, another took shape in the form of a thieving bird. This had to be dealt with drastically – no bribe was sufficient, here. A longbow could be found near a guardpost, and an arrow could be picked up in a farmhouse: together these formed the necessary retribution, and then it was possible to retrieve any stolen items provided the bird's nest had been located.

The next challenge took me some little while to sort out. It involved a burning hut, and here is where the move counter was in operation: if you couldn't put the fire out within a certain number of turns, then a despairing message flashed up telling you it was too late. The problem lay in quenching the fire. There was plenty of water in the village, and plenty of utensils for carrying water. However, throwing water on the fire did nothing to help because demonic forces were at work.

Eventually I located a chalice – a holy cup – and also a church which had some holy water in the font. Filling the chalice with this holy water, taking it to the hut and throwing the water on the fire were the actions required in order to put the fire out. When that was done I had chance to read a message which indicated that a seal was needed – and this seal was located somewhere in the ploughed field. Finding the seal and putting it to use involved just about the longest chaining puzzle I have ever encountered.

The field itself was no problem to locate, and in it was an abandoned plough. The plough, however, lacked its ploughshare – the metal bit which cuts into the ground and turns it over. Roaming around the village produced two broken pieces of a ploughshare, and there was a smithy near at hand with an anvil. The trouble was that the smithy fire was out – and before the ploughshare could be repaired it was necessary to find a means of lighting the fire, and some bellows to make the fire hot.

After that I had to find and harness a couple of oxen, take them and the mended ploughshare to the field, and then start ploughing. That is how the seal was unearthed and then it had to be pressed into the door which previously had denied me entry. Now that's a chaining puzzle!

9.5 Some amusing problems

I want now to turn to a couple of amusing problems which illustrate how adventure writers try to make things both interesting and yet not too difficult in the early moves of a game. There were a number of well written illustrated adventure games produced by Magnetic Scrolls in the late 1980s, and these were available for the Amiga, the Atari ST and the Archimedes at least – and maybe other machines as well. I am thinking of **Fish! The Pawn, The Guild** of **Thieves** and **Corruption.** They were highly entertaining and kept many a player – including myself – in a right old state of bafflement for many a long hour.

However, as you'll now see from the opening moves of two of them, a simple problem confronted the player very early on. It was just the right scale of difficulty and required only a little cogitation in each case; but in both

instances, the problem had the desired effect of giving an early boost to the confidence of any adventurer who was something of a beginner, and would thus lure them happily deeper into the game.

9.5.1 Fish! – the opening moves

Let's take **Fish!** first. Once loaded, the opening description ran as follows.

Someone's coming. Good, it must be time for food. SPLATTO. A hand as big as a bus drops something hard right on your head. Understandably dazed, you flip over and, through a swirl of ant eggs, spot what hit you: a tacky plastic castle. It looks like a rush job. Sir Playfair must be in trouble. And you thought you were on vacation......

Goldfish bowl

Swimming upside down is good fun, but difficult, even for someone as highly trained as yourself. It looks like the pondweed is dangling from the gravel above your head. And the ant eggs, wow! Upside down they look, so, so much like, well, like exactly the same as if you were the right way up actually. Anyway, there's no need to get carried away. Sir Playfair has a message for you in the castle if you're not much mistaken and he hates agents who are late.

Now then, this told me two things: first – and most obvious – was that being upside down was a condition that probably shouldn't be allowed to last; second – and again pretty obvious – was that swift entry into the castle was a most desirable objective. I put the two conditions to the test with one terse command: **Enter Castle**

I was promptly told: *You can't do that while you're upside down.*

Now it was simply a matter of testing the parser. I have to confess that the first entry I thought of was **Invert** – on the grounds, I suppose, that if you invert an inversion you end up with what you started out as. The parser proclaimed polite bafflement. I tried again, and entered **Turn Upright**. This time I was told that the word *Upright* was not part of the adventure's vocabulary. However, I felt I was on the right track and this time typed **Turn Over** – which is no doubt what a beginner to adventuring would have had the sense to try at the very first attempt. Anyway, I was rewarded with the following.

Goldfish bowl

The ant eggs have stopped swirling around and are now floating on the surface. Gravel fills the bottom of the bowl and some tasty looking pondweed you've been wanting to nibble for days is lying on it. You get a nasty feeling in your swim bladder about the castle, probably because Sir Playfair has so rudely interrupted your vacation.

Now if I were a beginner to gaming, I would feel very pleased at this result, and I would look forward to entering the castle and the adventure proper with a degree of confidence. I also would like to pay tribute to the quality of the illustrations that accompanied these first two scenes. When I reviewed the Archimedes version of **Fish!** I said they were of photographic quality.
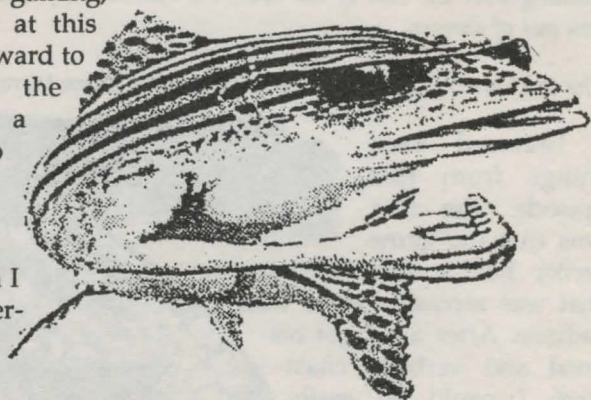
9.5.2 The Guild of Thieves – avoiding a ducking

Let's look at the second problem: it's equally amusing and equally encouraging. This time I've chosen **The Guild of Thieves** – where you start off in a boat.

In the Boat

Floating serenely in a small boat, pitching and rolling with the currents, you feel completely relaxed and ready for anything that life cares to throw at you. To the west is a jetty to which the boat is moored by a rope about two metres long. The master thief sits in the boat, eyeing you up and down with a look of utter contempt.

Now because I always read the opening description of an adventure very carefully indeed, I saw the clue to the initial problem which really only lay in wait for the unwary. Nevertheless, as you'll realise, I'm one of those people who still likes to test everything, just to make sure. The first move, therefore, that I made was **Examine Boat**. I was told that it was a small boat, only capable of carrying two people and their equipment. I double checked this by entering **Search Boat**. This time I was told that I found nothing of interest. Finally, I made an inventory check and learned that I carried a swag bag and wore a striped jersey. In other words I carried the standard equipment and clothing for a fictional thief.

It was time now to make the move I knew was wrong: I entered **West** – after all, the jetty lay in that direction. I was not disappointed for this is what I read.

Happily, as though without a care in the world, you step out of the boat onto the river. Remarkably the water fails to support your weight!

*Leaning over the side of the boat, the master thief catches you by the arm and pulls
you out of danger.*

The thief sneers: "Do you like wasting time when there is work to be done?"

I learned two
things from this
episode: the first
was that the game
writer had a sense of humour
that was sarcastic rather than
sadistic. After all, I got res-
cued and verbally chast-
ised: I could so easily
have been drowned in a
salaciously graphic epi-
sode and then (possi-
bly) resurrected with
dire warnings as to
future conduct.
Secondly, I knew for
sure that the clue in
the initial description
was there for a reason:
I mean the business
about the length of the
mooring rope.

The GUILD of THIEVES

By Magnetic Scrolls

I now tried what I had
suspected was needed
all along: **Pull Rope** and was
rewarded with the following comment.

As you pull on the rope the boat glides gently up to the jetty.

The point I really want to make here is this: I was pretty well sure what
action was needed in both these examples. Even so, I felt it important to try
other things as well, just in case. I suppose it comes back to the advice that I
always give before every move where the player is in doubt: save your
position first and then try everything you can think of. You'll rarely end up
the loser by adopting this approach.

10
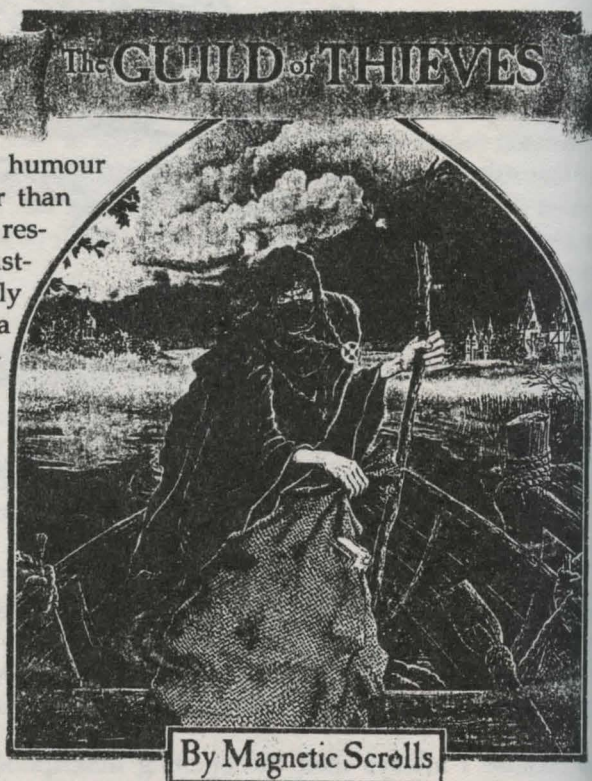
Checks and Balances

10.1 Weight watching in general

One fairly popular form of puzzle involves the idea that certain items, at least, in an adventure are reckoned to have weight. In the more sophisticated cases different items will be assigned different weights, just as in real life. At its simplest, this merely involves you being limited to a certain number of things which you can carry; if this limit has a measure of sophistication, then it will be possible to carry more items which are considered to be light than those things which are deemed to be heavy. You might well then have a limit of one or two heavy items and up to six lighter ones.

We have already seen something of this principle at work in the illustration from **Zork 1**, where I could only carry the lamp in addition to the picture, if I wanted to climb up the chimney in the artist's studio and so deposit my treasure in the trophy case.

10.2 Getting assistance

Again, I hinted at something similar when I dealt with the opening moves in **Scapeghost**, where you could gradually increase your strength by picking up only the lightest things at first and progressing by degrees to ones which were heavier. At the same time, you still needed some help from outside to open a door, for instance – in this case, one controlled by a rope handle.

The secret here was to befriend a dog. According to Pete Austin, dogs have the ability to see ghosts and this particular dog had a problem – a fish bone stuck in its throat. Once you had gained some ability to manipulate items, you could remove the fish bone and the dog then became your friend for life
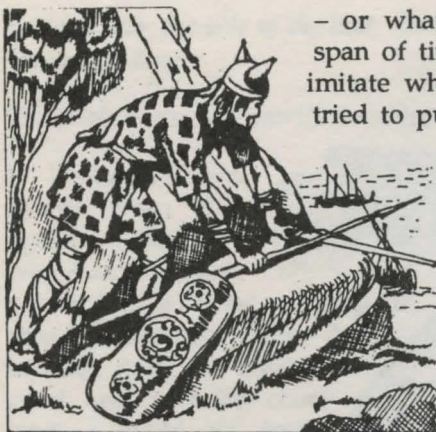
– or whatever a ghost would consider a suitable span of time. As your friend, the dog then would imitate what you did so that, for example, if you tried to pull on the rope handle you would fail to open the door, but the dog would then copy you and achieve what you wanted.

I've also mentioned the fact that, in some adventures, various ways of increasing your strength can be found. However, I want now to touch on one or two examples of games where the weight of something was used slightly differently.

10.3 Balancing acts

10.3.1 A lift system

First, I want to deal with a case from the Level9 adventure **Return to Eden**. There was a point in the game where you had to climb into some trees, and half way up a giant tree a couple of platforms were encountered which formed a simple lift system. By pulling levers you could make the platforms move but, you had to deposit a number of items on the south platform before you could use the north platform to go higher into the tree system.

I saved, naturally, before beginning to experiment and gradually worked out what was needed. Basically, if I dropped six or seven things on the south platform, and then went onto the north platform wearing only a fig-leaf and carrying an essential

Return to Eden
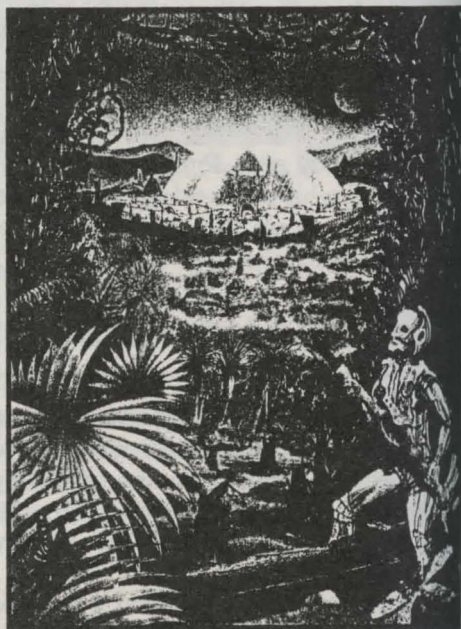
Level 9 Computing

compass, I could ascend higher – and face further difficulties as you will see. There was one item that had to be left in a place other than the north platform, though; this was a stone fruit. The clue to its weight lay in the name, of course, and it was just too heavy.

There was a little more weight related figuring to do almost immediately. Clinging to the topmost branches of the tree, I encountered a broken branch; it was possible to mend this with glue from a berry which I found nearby. That meant I could now go East and find two further items. Because the branch was so weak, even though it had been mended, I had to drop everything before I could cross safely and think about getting the cherry and the stalk which awaited me on the other side.

This was because I found that I could only carry a single item across the branch and get away with it. I was glad that I had made one of my usual temporary saves before trying anything. First try – before I suspected anything – the branch broke and I died. The second attempt saw me clad in fig-leaf but minus the compass and I arrived safely. I made the mistake of thinking that a cherry and a stalk wouldn't amount to much by way of weight, and I started off by trying to carry them back: the branch broke again, and I plunged once more to my death.

Third try had me totally naked as I tottered across that branch and grabbed the cherry. Back I went, full of triumph, and I dropped the cherry at the other side. The cherry exploded. Off I started for a fourth time, grabbed the stalk, returned, dropped the stalk and flinched. Nothing happened, and so I finally captured the cherry, retrieved my other items, and regained my modesty.

I was now in a position to go back down and carry on at ground level. It took me a little while to ferry everything down via the platforms and, of course, whatever else I did, I couldn't drop that dratted cherry which had turned out to be a hand grenade in disguise. I hope you begin to see why the system of temporary saves is absolutely vital: it only takes a relatively little time and can save a great deal of frustration.

Incidentally, that cherry was part of a chaining puzzle. It worked out like this: a wishbone which then had a rubber band tied to it emerged as a catapult. This could then be used to fire the cherry so as to clear a way through an otherwise impassable minefield. Ingenious, isn't it?

10.3.2 Another lift system

Another example of a weight related problem can be found in the adventure Oxbridge. Colin Jack, the author, only wrote two adventures as far as I know; they were **Programmer's Revenge** and **Oxbridge**. Both adventures were tape

based games for the BBC Micro and contained puzzles of considerable
sophistication and challenge – they were both very witty games as well. I
certainly rated them highly, though I would hesitate to recommend
adventures of this difficulty to beginners.

There was a point in **Oxbridge** where a hat and scarf needed to be retrieved
from a department store called Harrids. However, an alarm system prevented
them 'from being taken down the stairs, and any attempt to do so led to the
player being duffed up by a troll. To add to the complications the lift system
was described as out of order.

Scepticism is always a sensible policy for an adventurer, and so I decided to
test the truth of the out of order notices. I entered the lift with the hat and
tried to go down to the ground floor. I died as the lift crashed. Once again I
was glad I had made a temporary save before experimenting. I know I may
seem to be labouring this point, but it is just about the most important piece
of advice I can think of for a beginner.

Here was the puzzle: I could enter the lift while it was stationary, but
attempting to operate it was fatal. The only way I could move between the
different floors of the department store was by using the stairs. Eventually I
tried the following procedure: I deposited the hat in the lift, left it there, and
went down the stairs to the ground floor. Once I was downstairs, I pushed
the button to summon the lift. It came, and the hat was ready for the taking
because once the lift was at rest I could enter it safely and retrieve the hat.
Now I knew what to do, it was a simple matter to add the scarf to my
collection.

Here, the principle employed was to consider the player too heavy for the lift
to work safely, but the hat and the scarf were light enough not to matter. So
you see, the lift was out of order – in a way.

10.4 Traps for the unwary

10.4.1 Staying alive

Another type of puzzle where things encountered are assigned weight are
those involving trapdoors and other similar things designed to waylay the
unwary. You know the sort of thing, in a stone passage you suddenly
encounter a bit of the floor which is on a pivot and down you plunge to death
or whatever fate the programmer has in mind for you.

Something like that was to be found towards the end of the Level9 adventure
Emerald Isle once you had entered the temple. The first puzzle involved a

statue in the crypt of the temple. You had to stand on a block of stone, throw a long rope (which then wrapped itself round the statue) and pull the rope. That sequence opened the way into a stone chamber.

Once in the chamber, apart from reading some religious runes, you could proceed **East** into a thin tunnel and then **South** into a granite grotto. Now this grotto had a few words of advice inscribed upon its walls; they read: *Throw riches, not life.* I heeded the warning by making a temporary save and then went on **South** through an ornate opening. That move triggered a spear which killed me. Nothing daunted, I went back to my saved position and cogitated.

I checked my inventory, and remembered I was wearing a valuable robe encountered early on in the game, when it was essential to put it on if you were to get inside the palace area of the game. I tried throwing the robe, and I found that this action also triggered the spear. Now I could move on South through the ornate opening safely.

Once in the ornate opening I found the inscription: *Strive for balance.* Once again I made a temporary save, and then pressed on **West** towards a tiny tunnel – and died, of course, as my weight triggered a trap. I remembered the stone block that I stood on to throw the rope over the statue and went back for it. I found I was strong enough to carry it with some effort, and so I took it to the ornate opening and dropped it there. I saved my position once more, so as not to waste time retracing everything if I needed to add more weight, and then went onwards once again. This time I was successful; balance had been achieved.

A point from this example that is well worth emphasising, where beginners to adventuring are concerned, is the way I would have been absolutely lost for what to do if I had not noted down on my map of the game where the stone block had been located. Most good adventures take days – or even longer – to solve. This means that, usually, playing sessions have to be terminated from

time to time, even if it is only to catch up on much needed sleep. In my own case, I can rarely put in more than a couple of hours at a time – and occasionally my spare time is measured in minutes rather than hours.

So, I always make careful notes at the end of a playing session, particularly if I am part way through solving a problem like the one just mentioned. My map making process covers two stages: scribbled notes on rough paper, together with any suggestions as to how I might go about tackling puzzles and problems, form the first stage. The second stage consists of creating a wordprocessor file which is updated on disk every 10 locations; when I have covered about 100 different locations I then make a printout and will update that every 50 places or so. Most of the first rate adventures have a couple of hundred locations – or thereabouts – so it's not too wasteful of paper.

Since it took two playing sessions to cover the ground mentioned in the last example, I could have wasted a lot of time trying to remember what to do if I had not made notes – particularly if the playing sessions had been separated by a week or more, as can sometimes happen.

10.4.2 Co-operative efforts

I want to turn now to an interesting problem which, like the Goblins' dungeon in **The Hobbit**, required co-operation from another character. The adventure **Lancelot** was heavily based on the Arthurian legend, featured a valuable prize and was, in many ways, one of the most complex adventure games to be issued by the Level9 team in conjunction with Mandarin Software.

A move counter was in operation just to complicate matters, and many of the characters could be persuaded to help you – indeed progress through the adventure could not be made without this co-operation. Thus, a number of knights were held prisoner in a manor house, but the way to them was booby-trapped and involved a secret panel, which had to be held open by someone other than yourself, and access to a lift cage.

The solution involved getting the knight, Gawain, to hold the panel and stand on the planks (which acted as a safety catch) for you, while you examined the crossbow which formed the booby-trap device. You also had to get him to wait for a number of moves, and later operate the lift, while you got on with the job of freeing the nine captive knights. That sequence of moves took me three playing sessions to work out correctly.

There was an amusing little puzzle a bit earlier in the game, too. This involved an invisible character who had to be killed. It took me a little while to realise that the command required was simply: **Kill someone invisible!**

Because **Lancelot** was true to the Arthurian legend in many ways, knightly conduct and ethics played an important part in this adventure. Thus, almost the first thing to happen in the play sequence was an encounter with a Black Knight who barred your progress. If you didn't act chivalrously, when he yielded to your assault, you were in deep trouble since the Round Table would have lost its president. There were bad characters who had to be destroyed and others who had to be resisted – Morgan le Fay offered a tempting invitation, but to give in meant trouble! In this sense, Lancelot was a true monument to consistency.

10.5 The problem of the exploding parrot

I have already mentioned the amusing opening of the Magnetic Scrolls adventure **Fish!** and I now want to look at one problem in that adventure which made me laugh a great deal, and scratch my bald pate a little before I worked out what to do.

Once you regained your equilibrium it was possible to enter the castle which had earlier dented your swim bladder's sense of which way was up. Once inside there appeared to be an empty glass box, and three warps which beckoned invitingly.

The smooth warp opened onto a forest clearing and in the forest was also a smithy. When I entered this building, I was told that there was a cage and also a cupboard to be seen – and I naturally opened both. The cage contained a very nervous parrot which, while not enjoying being caged up, was very reluctant to emerge into the open. I therefore ignored the bird and turned my attentions to the contents of the cupboard – a crucible, a pair of tongs and a hammer, together with some asbestos gloves.

I examined each of these items, and I found that the hammer was a 600 dollar job, that the tongs were made of overwrought iron by a blacksmith of a nervous disposition, and that the crucible could well withstand the heat of the fire. I then turned my attention to the asbestos gloves – and discovered that they were of a special weave so that they didn't constitute a health hazard. My health mattered not in the slightest, as it turned out, because at that precise moment the parrot exploded – and precipitated me (in a slightly dead condition) back to the beginning of the adventure.

I hadn't been expecting exploding parrots, needless to say, so I had not taken any precautionary move by way of a temporary save. Back I went again, and this time saved my position outside the smithy, on the basis that any move counter would not be triggered until I had gone inside – and this turned out to be correct.

What I next did may sound daft, but I strongly believe in the methodical approach to any problem – and it was clear that I was going to need the tools and gloves, probably as part of a chaining puzzle. Anyway, I went back inside. This time I ignored the cage, and concentrated instead on the contents of the cupboard. I took them all, went back outside and waited. Sure enough, there was an explosion and inside the smithy I found lots of feathers but no cage. I also found no increment to my score.

I tried again. This time I concentrated on the cage. I took it, carried it outside, dropped it and then went back into the smithy and waited. Once again the parrot exploded without harming me and without my score being increased. I was sure, therefore, that I needed to let the parrot escape somehow – so long as I was nowhere near when the big bang occurred.

A bit more head scratching produced the answer. Entering the smithy I opened the cupboard and the cage – I knew I had time to do both before anything dastardly happened – and then went outside again. Sure enough, the parrot emerged and happily flew off, leaving me free to enter the smithy again. My score now went up to 20 points and I was able to gather the goodies unmolested. It didn't take very long to do all this and I learned an awful lot. Impatience is the adventurer's worst enemy.

One final comment about this particular adventure concerns a problem in the main part of the game – the area encountered once you have access to the dark warp. Players who are lost in the dimensions should not treat it as a maze – instead think of each exit as having an effect on the next one. My last hint here is to say that you need an uneven number of exits to solve this problem and, as always, logic and a methodical approach pay handsome dividends.

10.6 Demolition work

An adventure that provided an amusing and, initially slightly confusing, challenge in its early locations was one from the software house Topologika – Monsters of Murdac. It started by providing an invitation which was not so much a red herring as a distraction which robbed you of valuable points and a piece of equipment.

The distraction was simple: you started off outside a hut with a locked door. Now, as any seasoned adventurer knows, huts located at the start of a game simply cry out to be entered; when the added invitation of a locked door presents itself then the temptation to go chasing off looking for the key can be almost too much.

What led me to think that the locked hut was meant as a distraction did not emerge for some little while. This was partly because there were certain locations near the hut which proved mildly confusing at first, rather in the way that a maze can be. Thus, moving south from the hut led to a flower garden; however, moving north from the flower garden did not lead straight back to the hut. You finished up in a rock garden instead. Travelling east turned out to be the correct move to bring you back to the hut.

Add to that the fact that the same sort of thing happened from the rock garden, and you can begin to see why the initial mapping sequence took a move or two longer than usual. It was – as always – a matter of double checking everything to make sure that I had not made a mistake, and that I wasn't plunged straightaway into the type of problem that Bedquilt posed.

The result of this was that, when I eventually moved north from the vegetable garden (which was reached by moving south from the rock garden) I found myself barred by a newly completed brick wall which a couple of ogres had just built.

Now the way the description was worded suggested that a move counter was at work and that, if I took few enough moves, I might encounter a different scenario. This turned out to be the case. By moving south, north, south, north and north, I found myself by a brick wall which was not quite finished and therefore I was able to move on north through the gap.

At first, I wondered why I had bothered because the ogres promptly finished their work and thus barred my retreat back to the hut – which I was still convinced held the entrance to the adventure proper even if tackling it had to be postponed. Of course, I hadn't bothered to save my position before going through the gap in the wall, because so few moves were needed; I confess, though, that I had a few pangs of doubt.

Anyway, it was no use crying over spilt milk, or completed walls, for that matter, so I pressed on north and found myself at a dead end which contained a shawm. Somehow I had to get back through – or over – that wall. Now being the biblical scholar that I am, I knew that a shawm was an ancient musical instrument – along with sackbuts, serpents psalteries and the like. Thus, nothing daunted, I entered the command: play shawm. It certainly had results: the newly built wall promptly collapsed – and just as promptly flattened me.

My pangs of doubt, over not having saved before passing through the incomplete wall, doubled in intensity even while I chuckled at the fiendish trickery of the author of Murdac. Anyway, nothing daunted, I went back again – it really didn't take long – and tried one other move. This time I took the shawm and moved to the south of the alley by the wall, even though this was technically closer to it and tried again. This time the wall obligingly flattened itself without doing the same to me and I was able to carry on exploring.

It's worth just making a couple of other points about this particular adventure, because they illustrate important points for novice adventurers.

Firstly, I found a lamp by digging in a sandpit. I really can't emphasise enough the need to have a go at digging in every location that has soft earth, sand or the like. This lamp was a little different from most of those to be found in adventures because the description baldly stated that there was no visible means of turning it on. Now a lamp that can't be turned on is about as much use as a sword made of jelly, so I spent some time in rubbing it, wiping it and speaking to it (not always politely) in an effort to make it perform before I finally gave up and carried on.

The solution to the problem was very much akin to the immovable sword in the stone I described in **Zork 3**. When I eventually entered the hut, I found some steps leading down into the darkness and nothing much else. Since I had still not found any batteries, or magic cloth for rubbing lamps into life, I had no option but to go downstairs into the darkness even while I wondered what gruesome fate awaited me. The lamp turned on automatically: it was clearly a very sensitive lamp; photosensitive, that is.

10.6.1 Post demolition precautions

The second point is one that could easily have been overlooked. You need to remember that I had wantonly demolished the cherished workmanship of a couple of ogres in the same cavalier way that someone or other treated the walls of Jericho in days of yore. Anyhow, in **Murdac**, it was essential to take all the equipment I had found during my explorations outside into the hut. This equipment, naturally, included the key to the door.

Once inside, I needed to shut and lock the door of the hut in order to remain safe. Any player who neglected to take this precaution would find that, later on in the adventure the ogres reappear and (to quote the author) proceed to clobber you for destroying their wall. This simple precaution of locking doors is often worth taking where malevolent characters are likely to be encountered.

The safest procedure is to do the following: when you encounter a locked door and you have (you think) the key, then make a temporary save of your position before doing anything else. Next, unlock and open the door and go through. Now try and close the door and lock it after you. The final test is to try and unlock it again and then re-open the door.
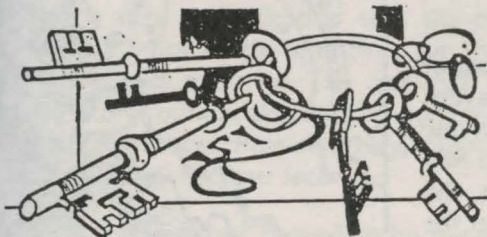
If you can do all these things, you should seriously consider leaving the door locked behind you – just in case. A further precaution is simply to leave the key on the ground near the door. However, you should only do that if you are absolutely convinced that the key is specific to that door alone, and that it won't open any other doors that might be encountered during the course of the adventure.

This sort of safety procedure only takes a few minutes, and it may well save hundreds of moves later on as you savagely retrace your steps through an adventure, moaning all the while because you forgot to lock a door behind you, and nemesis in the shape of vengeful ogres (or whatever) finally caught up with you. I often wonder how many people got caught in Monsters of Murdac.

10.7 Some lateral thinking

Another adventure from the Topologika stable was **Hezarin**, published in the summer of 1990. Author Jon Thackray introduced many amusing puzzles – and some of them contributed a great deal to my further education. I want us to look at two of them in some detail, because they show something of how adventure writers work. At the same time, they show how we should never take anything for granted.

10.7.1 A leap in the dark

The first puzzle was encountered pretty early on in the game. As with so many adventures of this kind, **Hezarin** contained a fairly short section above ground before inviting the adventurer to plunge into subterranean gloom.

Actually, the initial underground locations were pretty well lit with torches placed high up in the wall. However, there were only four such places, and there was no sign of a light source in any of the above ground locations. Something clearly had to be done.

All the torches were definitely out of reach from the floor of the cavern and attempts to jump and snatch one led to nothing. I began to think I had missed something vital up in the open air. I was nearly driven up the wall with frustration – and that, in fact, turned out to be the answer: I had to climb up the wall. Even so, I still could not reach the torch I wanted, something more had to be done. The answer was to jump from my position part way up the wall. That procedure got me the torch and – according to the screen message – a nice fat bruise as well.

The lesson to be learned here is that, sometimes, a combination of actions is needed in order to grab hold of something that is placed out of reach. Don't just try jumping or climbing on their own and leave it at that.

Now to a completely different style of puzzle encountered a little bit further on into the game. This time those nasty creatures called orcs were involved and so was a fair amount of lateral thinking.

10.7.2 Getting the crystal key

The basic puzzle was as follows: in four adjacent rooms lie four crystals which, when combined, form a crystal key needed to open a box. The trouble is that those four crystals are guarded by four fierce orcs who happily intend to do you a great deal of harm if you try to take them. Even though one or other of them can always be found asleep, they wake up the moment you attempt to grab the crystal. Also nearby is an armoury containing an empty display cabinet. Together these form the elements of a most ingenious puzzle.

Entering and searching the armoury produced nothing in the way of a weapon; however the moment you left the room a loud BANG occurred. This was meant to stir your curiosity just enough to make you go back into the armoury to see whatever had caused the explosion. If you did this, you would then find that the cabinet now contained a sword which you could take.

Duly armed with the sword, the prospects of tackling orcs seemed much better, but naked aggression turned out to be quite unsuccessful; something much more subtle was clearly required.

If you used the instruction **Listen** just outside the four rooms where the orcs were you were told that, from one direction, you could hear *a roaring like snoring* which was an indication that the orc there was asleep. Even so murder was still out of the question: for the most part you should leave sleeping dogs (and orcs) lie. The required move was simply to take the crystal. The orc would wake up and conveniently commit suicide on your sword which then, most inconveniently, vanished leaving you with the crystal and a bemused look on your face.

Returning to the armoury proved to be the proper follow-on move and, by going in and out and then back once more, another sword could be obtained: thus, three orcs could be dealt with and three pieces of crystal obtained. However, the fourth orc was not to prove such a pushover: he wouldn't go to sleep, and instead acted just like a 10-year old on Christmas Eve. The secret of success this time turned out to be not just the sword but a cloak which, when worn, rendered you invisible. Stealing the crystal now proves to be a snitch and, what's more, you get to keep the sword as well as the crystal key. For me, that puzzle had a touch of real class.

10.8 The adventure writer's mind

To finish this chapter, I want to quote from Jon Thackray's reviewers' notes about **Hezarin** because they provide valuable insight into what the top adventure writers have in mind as they set puzzles that are meant to tease us as well as entertain us.

In the above ground section of Hezarin, one location was a rubble pit from which a brass wheel could be retrieved after a little judicious digging. Jon later writes as follows:

We are now in a place with a pipe running from ceiling to floor, and a valve which can't yet be operated. This is where our brass wheel from the rubble pit comes in handy, enabling us to mend the pipe. So far so good, now we can do something with the pipe. (TURN WHEEL) So what has happened? The answer can be found not far

away, in a damp cave with a hole in it, from which we now find steam exiting. Of course we still don't know how this will help, but we can bear in mind that steam pressure can be very powerful.

Now I just want to draw your attention to one or two things which help to indicate where some sort of a chaining puzzle may be hinted at, because that is precisely what Jon was doing in his comments as quoted.
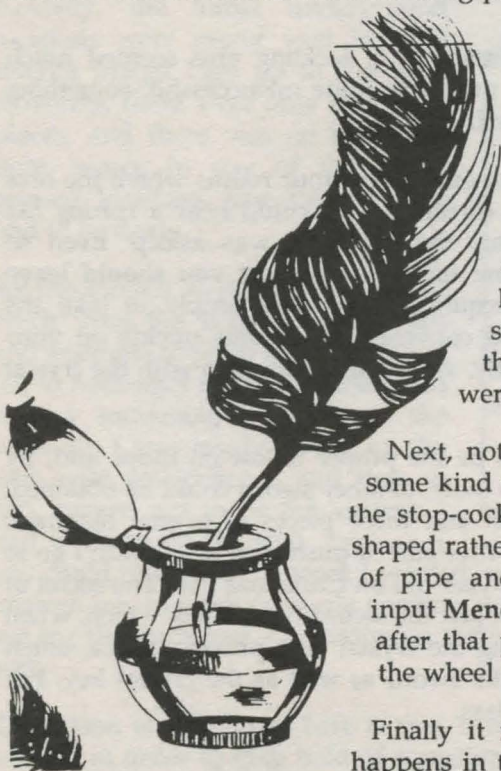
First, almost nothing located in an adventure is useless; so, a brass wheel dug up from a rubble pit has got to be of positive value somewhere. Second, note again how you should always try digging in likely locations: sometimes you need a tool such as a spade, but not always; in this particular adventure bare hands were all that was needed.

Next, notice that the brass wheel suggested some kind of control device. In my own house the stop-cocks on the water pipes are all wheel shaped rather than looking like taps. So, a length of pipe and an inoperable valve invited the input **Mend Pipe** as long as you had the wheel; after that process it is entirely logical to turn the wheel to see if anything happens.

Finally it is worth emphasising that nothing happens in the location where the wheel is; the damp cave with the hole is a little distance away - and of course the significance of the emerging steam has still to be discovered. You have a choice here: turn the wheel again to shut off the steam until you can find a use for it or let it accumulate uncontrolled. To find out more, buy the adventure!

What Jon, like all other top rank adventure writers, has done here is to provide plenty of clues and indicators for the intelligent player to get to work on, so that solving a puzzle becomes a step by step process of deduction and discovery.

What Really Counts

11.1 Move counters in general

In previous chapters I have touched on the use of move counters in adventure games, but I want now to deal with a more sustained exposition of this type of challenge because timing does appear to be getting more critical in many of the games produced in the last couple of years or so.

At its simplest, the use of a move counter gives the kind of adrenalin producing thrill derived from the initial move sequences in the Robico adventures **Enthar Seven** and **Myorem**. At a slightly more complex (though basically similar) level you have such games as **Corruption, Dodgy Geezers** and **Dennis Through the Drinking Glass**. Much of this chapter, therefore, is going to deal with the various kinds of situation in which move counters can be employed so that you can learn to detect them very quickly and so plan your campaign accordingly.

We'll start with an adventure where timing plays an important part in getting started properly. Where this particular adventure is kind, especially to beginners, is that it is not one which has inevitably fatal consequences if you get things wrong; in this sense it is different from **Myorem** and **Enthar Seven**. The adventure I have in mind is **Jinxter**, by Magnetic Scrolls - an amusing romp which is a few years old now, but which still has the entertainment value and staying power that characterises something of first rate quality.

11.2 An example of timing – Jinxter

You find that you are a passenger travelling on a bus. You first see a notice forbidding you to speak to the driver – and, as it happens, this piece of naughty behaviour is impossible to execute. At least, although I tried to do it in various ways, I only succeeded in getting the passengers to ignore me – which is what they were doing in the first place.

Next, you can see a set of automatic doors and a button mounted above them. I'm an absolute sucker for buttons, and I tend to push them whenever I can, so I pushed away happily even before I had done my inventory check the first time I played this game. It just shows – as always – life is often a matter of: "Don't do as I do, do as I say". The only difference is that I'm being honest about it in this particular case.
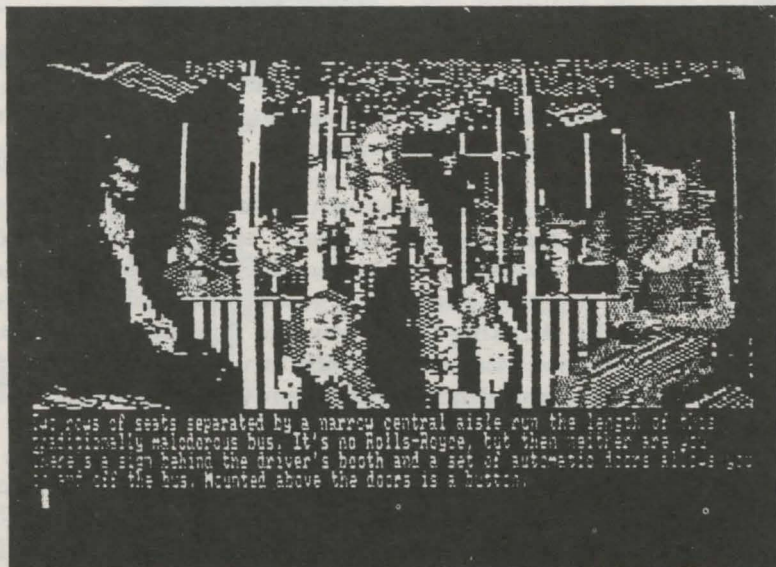
Anyway, nothing happened immediately except that the rest of the passengers looked annoyed since none of them was getting off at the next stop. After that, the bus made an unscheduled stop in order to allow an inspector to board it, and so I swiftly made a check of my possessions: I found that I was carrying a key ring and a bus ticket and that I was decently dressed.

I next found that I had to wait a little before the inspector approached me. When he did eventually arrive, he informed me that I needed to alight two stops further on. I had two choices here: I could either get off at the stop when the bus driver responded to the button, or I could hope to carry on and ignore the fact that the bus stopped where I had asked it to.

Research showed that either option was viable: I could get off the bus when it stopped because I pushed the button, or I could ignore the halt and continue to the proper place. If I got out early I then had to walk west for as many moves as I would have to wait on the bus while I was a passenger. What this little episode did was to alert me to the existence of a move counter without doing me damage: it was a helpful and forgiving adventure.

I have to say that **Jinxter** didn't stay in forgiving mode for very long. The puzzles and problems began to increase in complexity steadily in a way that would challenge the most ardent adventure addict. I will leave readers with one further hint concerning a delightful puzzle to be found within the depths of this game. There's a place where you will need to dig before you can make any more progress: the ground, though, is too hard for you to penetrate without the aid of a pick and shovel. The trouble is that a pick and shovel are nowhere to be found in Jinxter – what you need is a natural, living entity which loosens soil happily; it's a creature which, in certain circumstances, doesn't know its head from its tail.

11.3 A call for repeated action

One adventure which had a very simple move counter at work was issued by the software firm Melbourne House which, at the time of writing, now comes under the Virgin Mastertronic label. It was a political satire, which I encountered on the BBC Micro, called **Denis Through the Drinking Glass**. In this happy fantasy, once you had evaded the magnificent Maggie, it was possible to discover a flask hidden in a plant pot. From then on, you had to take a swig every 10 moves or so, in order to complete the game. Another example of a very simple move counter occurs in the Level9 game **Adventure Quest** when, to avoid being swallowed up by the sand-worm in the desert, you had to stop moving momentarily: five consecutive moves were fatal.
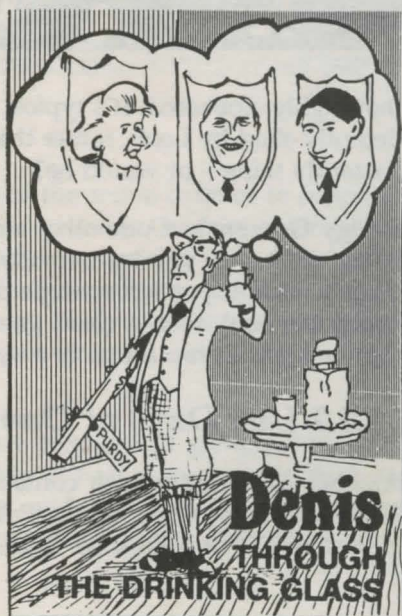
11.4 Critical timing

A more sophisticated example of a move counter was found in the adventure **Dodgy Geezers** – another Melbourne House offering. In part one of this two part game precise timing was essential. A strong hint that this was the case came in the form of an indicator showing both the time and the day.

11.4.1 Dodgy Geezers

You start off in a prison cell on the day of your release. If you proceed directly to the Governor's Office rather than going to the Visitors' Room, for example, you will miss encountering your old friend George. Without his advice you are never going to make serious progress through this adventure.

Similarly, if you wait around long enough in a seedy cafe you will overhear one side of a phone call giving you valuable clues as to what should be done later on in the adventure. The same sort of opportunity turns up if you wait outside a library until it opens and then obtain valuable information on sewers. On the other hand, should you find yourself being shadowed by a sinister figure wearing Gucci shoes, hanging around results in you being thoroughly clobbered. It's typical of these degenerate days – a chap who was decently shod by Lobb, rather than by some foreigner would never do such a dastardly thing – or would he?

Dodgy Geezers had one other amusing twist – you might even call it a sting in the tail – once you have finally hijacked some gold which was crated up in a bank vault. If you left a single piece of evidence showing that you had been inside the bank then a clean getaway was impossible. Everything has to be replaced just as you found it: a very clever addition to a first rate adventure.

11.4.2 Last Days of Doom

Another adventure which contained a move counter in its early stages was **The Last Days of Doom** – a Peter Killworth creation issued by Topoligika. You start out in a crashed spaceship caught in a crevasse which is closing

inexorably. You only have time to save yourself by leaving the rest of your crew to their messy fate. As Peter comments: the death of the crew is one of several features designed both to worry the player, and to make him question the morality of many of the *normal* actions in an adventure game.

It's worth remembering that many adventures deliberately eschew the *slash 'n' slay* attitude to be found in a lot of arcade games; quite often violence turns out to be highly counterproductive. Interestingly enough, in Last Days of Doom, you have to die in order to succeed in your mission: in a time travel sequence you are actually shown the moment of your death – and nothing can be done to avoid it. The move counter steadily ages you, and causes you to become progressively more wounded, until eventually you succumb. It brings a whole new focus onto the concept of altruism in adventures.
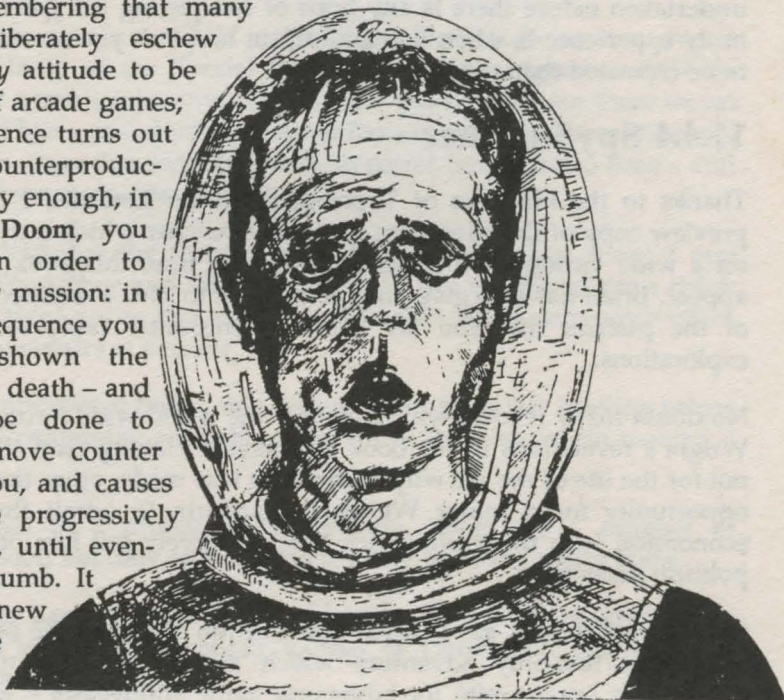
11.4.3 Corruption

The last game I want to use as an example of the move counter in action is Corruption, by Magnetic Scrolls. The background to this entertaining adventure is simple enough: you are offered a partnership in a firm in the City, and the action starts on your first day in this exalted position. However, everything is not as it seems, and you are very likely to be framed for fraud and end up in jail. Your task is to prove you are innocent and collect evidence to show who really is guilty.

Many of the characters in this adventure are engaged in going about their own business. Sometimes timing is absolutely crucial if you are to pass on messages, rifle the desks in empty offices and generally make progress through the game. Each single move taken means that a minute of time

passes, and so it is absolutely essential to be in the right place at the right time.

Since you are only going to discover gradually what the places and critical times are, it means that a great deal of exploration and research has to be undertaken before there is any hope of completing the game. A particularly nasty experience is when you land up in hospital: you are much more likely to be cremated than cured.

11.4.4 SpySnatcher

Thanks to the kindness of Topologika's Brian Kerslake, I have received a preview copy of the adventure game SpySnatcher which is due to be released on a wide variety of formats at about the time this book is scheduled to appear. Brian has also given me permission to give a detailed account of one of the puzzles that you are likely to encounter fairly early on in your explorations.

No doubt many readers will remember the world-wide furore raised by Peter Wright's revelations in his book Spycatcher. Having read the book, I could not for the life of me see why such a fuss was made, other than providing the opportunity for a senior Whitehall mandarin to admit that he had been economical with the truth, which I expect merely put him on a par with his political masters.

However, that book gave David Seal and Jon Thackray the perfect excuse for creating a text-only adventure which affords an entertaining and very challenging opportunity for adventure game enthusiasts – who are particularly keen on those of a whodunnit variety – to test their skills and deductive powers.

The adventure opens with you being summoned by Sir Arthur Cayley (otherwise known as Z) who is the head of MI7 which, so that it will not be confused with that august organisation The Circus, is known as The Zoo.

Sir Arthur is sure that there is a mole somewhere in MI7, and he is particularly worried because he has a strong suspicion that the plans for the new Sonic Macrothrodule have been leaked. Your job is to act as an anti-molecular ferret, and weasel out all the information which will enable you to point the accusing finger correctly at the climax of the adventure.

As part of your briefing you are given a fair amount of background information, which not only sets the scene, but also shows you some of your working parameters: once again, it pays to take careful note of the opening paragraphs of information.

The plans for the Sonic Macrothrodule were kept in Sir Arthur's office safe, and were there when he came into work yesterday at 9 am. This morning when he came in he found that the contents of his safe had been disturbed, even though the plans were still there. Sir Arthur reckons it would have taken at least an hour to remove the plans, copy and then replace them.

Apart from various members of MI7 staff who are likely to be encountered, a Superintendent Hardy of the Special Branch has been assigned to MI7 on special duties for some weeks now. You, on the other hand, are there on an entirely unofficial basis, and thus you cannot have open access to confidential files. Furthermore, there is a security guard on patrol from time to time – and if he spots you the game is over, literally.

Finally, you are told that the security guard usually patrols at about 7 pm; and, just before Sir Arthur and Superintendent Hardy are joined for a drink by an un-named third party, you are advised to start in his secretary's office because she is downstairs at present.

Now there are a number of things that we can learn from this briefing before we even think of continuing with the game – and they are worth making a careful note of.

❏ We are engaged in a process of elimination. There are a number of suspects, no doubt; but only one of them is likely to be the guilty party.

❏ We are going to have to acquire a considerable amount of information. In this sense, the gameplay is similar to that of Corruption, but it has a number of added difficulties.

❏ We have got to look for someone who had the necessary opportunity. We were told that the process of taking the plans, copying them and then replacing them in the safe, would take at least an hour.

❏ We are looking for someone who had a motive. Was it a political motive, the offer of money or pressure of some other kind that made them do this?

❏ You have got to avoid being seen at all costs.

❏ You are up against a move-counter – hinted at in the introduction and confirmed the moment you start the game. You commence at 6 pm and each move takes one minute.

❏ Who was that un-named third party who joined Sir Arthur at the last minute? The inclusion of that person will not be a casual thing, you can be sure of that.

When you think about it, you will see that we have learned quite a bit even before we have started; and the things we have learned will have a big influence on the way we tackle the game. My best advice is to say that, to begin with, your evidence will only accumulate very slowly. I'll give a few hints in a moment before we look at the puzzle in detail, but make your motto for this game: *Patience Pays*.

Don't be afraid to make a wide variety of initial moves: although Sir Arthur made a suggestion, that was only concerning one course of action; there are many offices to be explored and, since a move-counter is at work, some of them undoubtedly ought to be explored before others.

Finally, where initial move sequences are concerned, it's always possible that Sir Arthur's advice, though well meant, may not have been the best possible. Your only way of finding out is to make the widest variety of opening moves possible and then compare notes so that you accumulate valuable information.

Whenever you enter a room, you will tend to find it unlit and therefore you can see nothing. The simple command ON invariably rectifies this situation. When you enter the office containing a tape recorder take special note of what is said to be going on: this will provide vital information as to how the early stages of the adventure should be tackled.

Last tip of all concerns the parser. As with most modern text adventures, multiple commands can be entered in SpySnatcher; they simply need to be separated by a comma thus: N,N,N,W,READ BOOK.

Now for the puzzle. One clever aspect of SpySnatcher's programming concerns code words and similar devices for protecting secret information. There is quite a large variety of them, and there is no point at all in my attempting to give you the ones that I successfully used when I explored the game, simply because they will almost certainly be different for you.

What I can do, though, is examine one of the puzzles in some detail so as to illustrate the thinking that lies behind it. Most of the puzzles assume a certain amount of deductive ability, coupled with the kind of general knowledge that is specific to the United Kingdom.

There comes a point in the game where you come across a document (one of many scattered throughout SpySnatcher) and, if you read it, you will come across something like the four lines set out on the next page:

How many French hens were there?

7, 8, 5, 5, 3, 4, ...

Single I am but perfect

A vertical line

Now you're not going to get very far in the adventure unless and until you can crack this conundrum. However, it will probably not appear in that identical form when you play SpySnatcher. Instead, it might appear as the four lines that follow.

How many turtle doves were there?

6, 6, 7, 9, 8, ...

Single I am but perfect

A circle

However, it is quite possible for the four lines to be in another form still.

How many French hens were there?

6, 6, 7, 9, 8, ...

Single I am but perfect

A lemniscate

Or again, it might appear as set out below.

How many gold rings were there?

3, 3, 5, 4, 4, 3, ...

Single I am but perfect

A lemniscate

In effect, what we have here are four separate puzzles that need to be solved and then combined together to form something which will help us later on in the adventure. In other words, it is a sophisticated version of our old friend the chaining puzzle.

If you look carefully at the four examples I have given, you will notice that the third line never varies at all – and that, in fact, is the case every time; it

was not just a random accident. You will also notice, though, that the other lines do differ in some degree. So let's start with the first line and puzzle.

It was a *How many?* question which gives us a clue as to the whole answer. The question *How many?* always has to be given a numerical answer: therefore, the likelihood is that we shall, in fact, be looking for four answers that will combine together to give us four digits to be used somewhere else in the game.

Those who are accustomed to western culture will recognise at once that the first line is a reference to a song about Christmas that begins:

On the first day of Christmas my true love gave to me, a partridge in a pear tree.

The song goes on to indicate the various gifts given on each day escalating daily, until on the 12th day the true love donated 12 people doing something or other. I think it was 12 lords a-leaping – though the thought of a gaggle of geriatric gents cavorting around does make the mind boggle!

It means, therefore, that a little research amongst the Christmas music section of your local music shop will soon produce the answer to the first number required if you don't know the song.

The second line of the four-part puzzle had three variations, and it could either read:

7, 8, 5, 5, 3, 4, ...

or:

6, 6, 7, 9, 8, ...

or:

3, 3, 5, 4, 4, 3, ...

The requirement here is to produce the next number in the sequence – and it requires some intuitive reflection as well as deductive reasoning. It reminds me a little of the sort of problem that I faced as a child doing the old 11-plus examination papers, though they were somewhat simpler. The clue I'll offer is simply to say that, if you look at a calendar, the solution is staring you in the face.

The third line – which never varies – is a request for a single-digit perfect number. If you are at school, ask your maths teacher if you don't know, and if you are beyond school age and are not that numerate there's bound to be someone you know who can supply the answer.

The fourth line has three variants: a vertical line, a circle and a lemniscate. A little thought should enable you to draw your own conclusions with two out of the three, and a decent dictionary will supply the answer to the third – which in fact rhymes with its conundrum, anyway.

Once you have acquired the four figure number you will be part way to opening up the main section of the game which is a classic example of the move-counter controlled adventure.

11.5 Clues to look out for

Sometimes the presence of a move counter at work is signalled in a straightforward way; on other occasions it may be a little while before the fact becomes obvious. There are a number of signs to watch for which can prove helpful, though. The fact of the decaying orbit in **Enthar Seven**, and the arrival of the firing squad in **Myorem**, sent out pretty clear signals that the opening moves needed careful timing. Other clues to look out for include such things as being told that it is a particular time of day or day of the week. You may well be informed that each move takes up a designated unit of time, and sometimes – though not always – you will find that the total number of moves you make is recorded somewhere on the screen.

Once you do discover that certain moves are time-critical, there's a lot to be said for going back right to the very beginning of a game and then carefully retracing your steps. While you do this you should keep a sharp lookout for such things as telephones, shops which are said to be shut and so-on. You might well then learn something new which will prove very helpful in approaching a problem that previously had you completely foxed.

11.6 Graphic adventures

The very first graphic adventure I ever encountered also turned out to be heavily dependent on timing, though I want to move on to deal with graphic adventures in general and discuss some of the puzzles contained in them rather than concentrate on the timing factor.

As I mentioned in the first chapter, I divide adventure games into three distinct categories these days: there are pure text adventures, illustrated adventures and graphic adventures – which should not be confused with arcade adventures.

As processors were developed which could address larger and larger areas of memory, and as the price of memory chips steadily went down, so the

possibility of pure graphic adventures turned into reality, and by about 1987 a steady flow of this type of game was coming onto the market.

Most graphic adventures exploit the WIMP (Windows Icons Mouse Pointer) environment that has now become commonplace and the screen is divided into three or four different sections, depending on the programmers' approach.

First, there is the main screen area which normally contains the bulk of the graphics – this usually contains a detailed picture of your location. Next will be a command window showing a fairly limited vocabulary – the player is lucky if there are as many as a dozen different words available – a separate window will often indicate what exits are available. Finally, there is usually a dialogue box where the results of your action are printed on the screen. In some adventures you can also type in rather more complex instructions than are otherwise available from using the mouse.
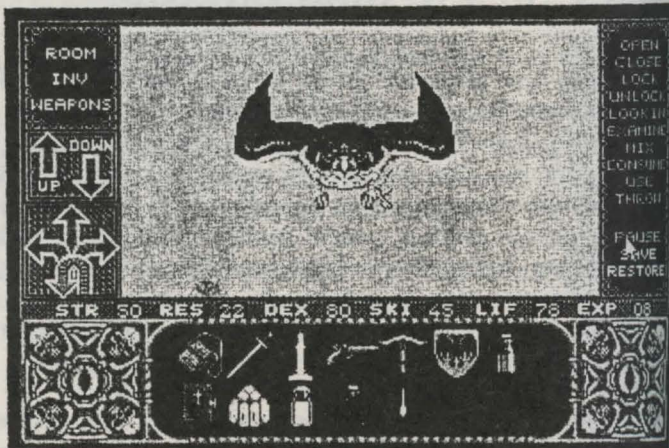
Using the mouse you can point to an instruction and then, when you have clicked on the mouse to activate whichever word you chose, point to the object you wish to manipulate. Personally, I find this a slightly cumbersome process: it usually takes me a little longer to click on the instruction Open (for example) and then point to a door, than it does for me to enter the same command directly from the keyboard.

At the same time you can use the mouse – in certain games, at any rate – to drag an object you wish to take and drop it into the box which contains your inventory, and sometimes this turns out to be a much simpler process than typing in a fairly complex instruction from the keyboard. It also means you do not have to struggle with a parser that refuses to understand what you are trying to say by way of a command. The old saying "what you lose on the swings, you gain on the roundabouts" holds true for graphic adventures.

One thing is certain, because the pictures are so memory hungry, most graphic adventures of any complexity have a minimum of two disks and often more. It is commonplace for adventures for the Atari ST to have five disks so as to ensure that owners of early machines with only single sided drives can still be accommodated. This does, however, make for a great deal of disk swapping – and this happens particularly in the early parts of an adventure when you are conducting initial explorations.

I seem to be forever swapping discs when I am making my initial map, as I find myself very often forgetting which part of the main picture lies in which compass direction. I am sure this happens for many people who do not have particularly effective visual and spatial recall. This is specially the case where the graphic adventure includes animation.

11.6.1 Gold Rush

The first actual adventure I came across of this type was an adventure by Sierra On Line called **Gold Rush**. I saw the Atari ST version, and certain things about it impressed me very much indeed. The background to the setting – that of the California gold rush of 1848 – was very well documented - and this helped to convey a real sense of authenticity.

You played the part of a young man, Jerrod by name, who was captivated by the lure of untold riches and who decided to leave his humdrum existence in New York and head southwest to California. The adventure allowed the choice of three different routes: you could travel overland by stagecoach, steamer and wagon train; you could go partly by sea, and partly by land, via the Panamanian isthmus; or you could attempt the perilous rounding of Cape Horn with all the attendant dangers of a long sea voyage.

Once I had overcome my initial difficulty – learning how to get Jerrod to move precisely where I wanted him to, I began to enjoy myself as I figured out the different puzzles that needed to be tackled. However, at the end of the day I found the gameplay somewhat sluggish, no doubt because the animation side of the adventure slowed the whole process down considerably.

11.6.2 Iron Lord

A challenge which contains elements of the illustrated adventure, the animated adventure and the arcade game, is one for various computers, including the Archimedes, called **Iron Lord**. Programmed by a French software house, Ubi Soft, it was adapted for the United Kingdom market by Cygnus Software.

The Archimedes version ran considerably faster than anything I have seen on other machines, and this made the animated sequences much more acceptable. The graphics are superb and the accompanying music is absolutely first rate in its authenticity. The entire game is operated via the mouse in a way that will be entirely familiar to those who have encountered a graphic adventure.

The scenario is mediaeval: returning from fighting in the Holy Land you discover that your father, the king, has been overthrown by your scheming and ruthless uncle. Terror and repression now stalk the land. I am indebted to my younger son, David, for the following information, since, at the time of writing, he won't let me have more than the briefest of playing sessions.

At the heart of **Iron Lord** is a prolonged chaining puzzle: your task is to raise a sufficient number of armies so as to defeat the forces of your wicked uncle. The minimum number of armies needed to do this is seven, and the maximum number of armies you can obtain is 10. The final battle involves a strong element of strategy gaming – and if you succeed here you then have a number of mazes to conquer together with some arcade game sequences.
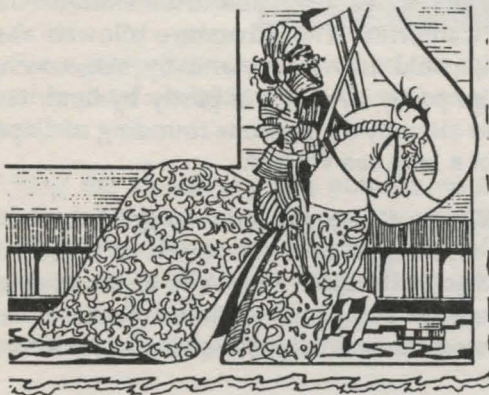
Your initial task involves visiting the village of Chatenay Malabry where you must first take part in an archery contest. This involves some arcade elements as you calculate the direction and strength required to land your arrows as near the gold as possible. There are three matches of seven rounds each, and you have to win each match in order to be awarded the prize cup. It's not so easy as it looks, but practice makes perfect. One amusing touch has to do with the scorekeeper: he hides behind a bush situated some way from the target and, if you are accurate enough, it is possible to land an arrow smack in his upturned backside bringing forth a highly satisfactory yelp of anguish.

Once you have won the cup, you should seek out the herbalist who lives in the village: if you present him with the cup, and then ask his help in raising an army, you will get an enthusiastic response. Interaction with characters in the game is through a special window that opens, giving you the option of

clicking on a limited number of instructions. These are: **Inventory, Examine, Discuss, Buy, Give** and, for when you have completed your transaction or enquiry, **Leave**.

After dealing with the herbalist you move on to the village of Lorando where you can encounter a salesman of ill repute. If you ask him for help in raising an army he will tell you that he needs to recover a stolen necklace which is very valuable. If you then go on to the mill, you will be told that the village innkeeper in Lorando refuses to pay for his supplies of flour – and you can begin to see how the elements of a very long chaining puzzle are beginning to build up.

I'll carry on with this account of Iron Lord, because it is one of the finest graphic adventures I have come across for any computer. If you leave the miller and return to the village of Lorando, your next job is to ask the innkeeper to pay the miller for his flour. You will then be told that the flour was full of weevils and that the innkeeper is certainly not going to pay the miller for substandard goods. You will also be told that the innkeeper longs to get his hands on a supply of the superb wine made at the Abbey of the Templars.

You should now visit the abbey and have a chat with the Abbot. He will tell you that he can't possibly raise an army to help you because most of his monks are sick. They have succumbed to the influence of a mysterious poison and no amount of prayers makes any difference: an antidote must be sought. The abbot will also tell you that he has a longstanding difference of opinion with the innkeeper, and that he certainly won't consider supplying him with the wine made at his monastery.

And so the game goes on: if you can work out how to help each character encountered during the course of the adventure then you can get them to return the favour and thus, eventually, you will be able to raise enough armies to defeat your wicked uncle. You might well find yourself attacked by armed assassins; you will certainly have to do a little gambling by rolling some dice in order to raise enough money to help you on your way. And you will also have to do some arm-wrestling at one point in the adventure. A tip here from David, my younger son: you stand a better chance of winning the arm-wrestling contest if you are well fed and watered.

11.6.3 Wonderland

Another example of a recent adventure available on a number of different formats is **Wonderland** programmed by Magnetic Scrolls and published by Virgin Mastertronic. This is probably the most sophisticated adventure game I

have come across – and I'm not just saying that because my pen name is The Mad Hatter!

Wonderland is very closely based on the Lewis Carroll story, but with interesting additional touches. If you are a total purist you can play the game in text-only mode; the quality of the text makes this a perfectly enjoyable process. However, the graphics are quite superb in themselves and, provided you have a computer with sufficient speed and memory, certain parts of the game can be animated as in **Iron Lord**. I particularly enjoy watching the caterpillar smoking his hookah and his changing expression. Basic requirements to run Wonderland successfully are, where PCs are concerned, 500k or so of free RAM and the faster your processor runs, the better the results are. My PC has a clock speed of 10 MHz and while **Wonderland** runs a little slowly, I don't find my enjoyment marred in any way.

One of the central features of **Wonderland** is the fact that the vast majority of doors are locked – or at least, that is my experience to date, as I have not yet completed the game. I'll attempt to give you the flavour of a puzzle involving a key which is found before you enter the main part of the adventure.

Wonderland starts off almost exactly as does the book, except that it is advisable to leave your sister and wait for the pears to ripen before picking one. Then you simply follow the White Rabbit as he rushes into his hole and then you tumble down into the adventure.
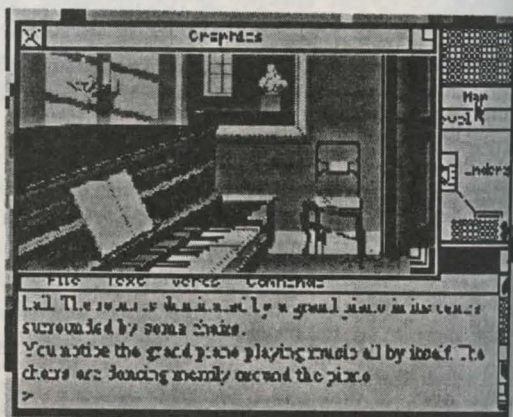
At the bottom of the hole is a pile of leaves which should be searched – indeed, as with most adventures, the player should examine just about everything encountered in Wonderland very carefully indeed. Don't be afraid to look under things as well. Not far away from the bottom of the hole is a music room, and there is a piano playing away merrily while some chairs waltz around enjoying themselves. Opening the piano and looking inside reveals that there is a key inside.

If you now enter the instruction **Take the Key**, you'll be asked which key – because a second one is now revealed. Taking the key in C is no problem whatever; by contrast, the key in ♭ is a much tougher proposition because it

is out of reach. Experimentation soon shows that the piano is too fragile to bear your weight, so climbing onto it would appear to be out of the question. Further investigation showed that, from time to time, a chair came near the piano and that if you took the music from the piano the dancing would stop.

I tried climbing on the chair (no problem) and then reaching into the piano, but this was still not allowed. There had to be a way of getting that key, but it became plain that the answer lay elsewhere. Further explorations took me to a long hallway with many doors leading from it and, apart from the one I came through, they were all locked.

Readers of the book *Alice in Wonderland* will not be surprised to know that there was a glass box with some cake in it, and a glass bottle with a potion in it. Each container had an indication that the contents would alter your size, but I tested this theory out anyway. The potion made me small for a short while, and the cake made me grow so fast that I banged my head on the ceiling, causing me to sustain severe injuries. I was dumped out of the game; fortunately I had taken my own advice and so quickly restored my position without having to go through the first dozen or so moves again.

I began to wonder if being smaller might help me get the key in G. It was almost certain that the cake would be no use in solving this particular puzzle, but being smaller should also mean I would be lighter in weight. Back to the music room I went, stopped the dancing when a chair was near the piano, stood on the chair and drank the potion. I then tried climbing into the piano – and it worked. I grabbed the key, scrambled back onto the chair and soon reverted to my normal size.

Incidentally, this key certainly provided a means of unlocking one of the doors in the long hall, but it wasn't possible to take advantage of this fact. I still had to work out a way of leaving that particular location – but that's another story, **Wonderland** is too new for me to want to spoil people's fun by telling too much. There is an on-line help system with the adventure, anyway, and this offers a number of hints for each problem if they are needed.

One thing I will remind you of, however, is that – just as in the book – size is critical at times in the game, because certain doors are too small for you to go through when you are your normal height, and some things can only be reached by being very tall. A couple of pouches can help here even though there isn't much room in them. Lastly, so far as **Wonderland** is concerned, don't be afraid to go paddling – if you beaver away at this, plenty of interesting discoveries await you.

11.6.4 The Secret of Monkey Island

Another graphic adventure which was released at about the same time as Wonderland was Lucasfilm's **The Secret of Monkey Island**. I have played the PC version and found it vastly entertaining – with one or two quite new touches, so far as I was concerned. **Monkey Island** is a light-hearted romp involving the efforts of an engaging character, called Guybrush Threepwood, who wishes to become a proper pirate.

The first new feature to catch my eye was the use of automated dialogue between characters: at certain points in the game you just sit back and follow the conversation as it appears on the screen. Some of this is quite witty, and provides valuable clues as well: however, slow readers might find things a little difficult at times.

The second new feature was the use of automated animation from time to time. I am not merely thinking of the way the swordplay is conducted, but rather the way in which Guybrush Threepwood marches on stage at the beginning and then proceeds independently to make his way to the place where the first encounters with piratical characters take place. Similarly, when you wish to engage a particular character in conversation, Guybrush marches up to them if he is not already somewhere near.
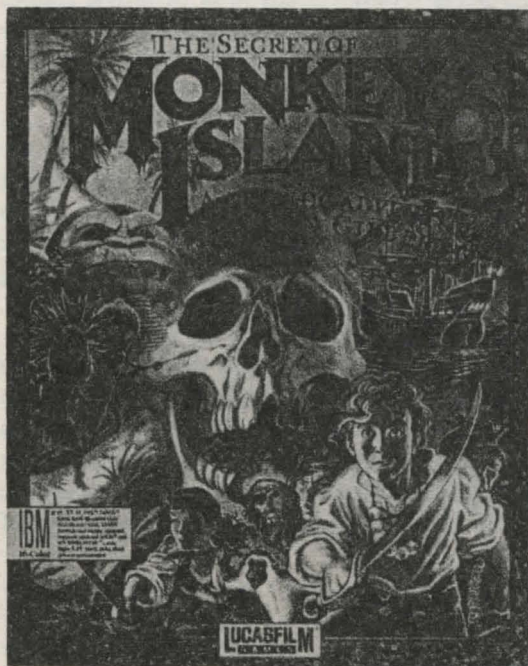
The limited vocabulary available belies the sophistication of the game: the commands are only a dozen in number – but that little word *use* has considerable power – and the most likely command needed is automatically chosen as you indicate a particular object. Thus, if you point to a door that is closed, the command *open* is highlighted and a click on the mouse button activated the command.

There are many delightful minor puzzles in **Monkey Island** in addition to the more major tasks which need to be fulfilled before you can obtain a boat, recruit a crew and set off to deal with the villainous

Captain LeChuck. One of the first things you need to do involves getting some money, and I confess to having been a bit flummoxed at first, for reasons which I'll explain in detail in case some readers have been similarly brought to a standstill.

I thought at first that the way to get the loot would be by burglary: the Governor's mansion beckoned, and all I had to do was find a way past those dratted piranah poodles. Feeding them with the chunk of meat I found in the kitchen area of the Scumm Bar wasn't enough – the poodles gobbled it gratefully and then resumed their surly snarling at once if I tried to approach them.

Clearly the meat had got to be doctored in some way if the poodles were to be pacified and become dozy rather than dangerous. I tried all sorts of things, including cooking the meat in the kitchen cauldron, trying to souse it in grog, and a few other things as well. All the time I was barking up the wrong tree!

What I hadn't realised was that I needed to become part of a circus act, and I hadn't realised either that I needed to go back to the lookout point which was featured at the very beginning of the adventure. Because Guybrush had marched in at the beginning and, after engaging the lookout in conversation, had then trotted off towards the town without any intervention on my part, it took a while for the penny to drop: after that, I had access to the whole Island. I suspect this was intended as a very subtle piece of misdirection – and it succeeded.

Some readers may well be having problems getting access to the kitchen: certainly the cook will not allow you to enter while he is able to see you. The solution to this problem is fairly straightforward: wait in the bar somewhere near the curtain and, when the cook comes into the front part of the bar to collect glasses, make a beeline for the kitchen door. The moment the cook has disappeared off the screen you can enter the kitchen with impunity. Apart from anything else, there is an item there which can be put to good use as a tin helmet.

Once I had access to the whole island, I was able to find the soporific additive that was needed for poodle pacification; and I was both amused and heartened to be told that the poodles were only sleeping and not slain. In fact, one of the virtues of this adventure is its non violence. Even though you have to engage in swordplay, manual dexterity is not the measure of your prowess, rather it is the way in which you can hurl barbed insults at your opponent that brings victory.

Mind you, when you eventually cross swords with her eminence the Swordmaster, you'll have to apply your vocabulary in quite new ways – her insults aren't the same as those meted out by your previous opponents. When

I finally gained access to the Governor's mansion I was entranced by one of the automated animation scenes: a fight takes place – but not in front of your eyes – and every so often Guybrush Threepwood appears and some of the comments he makes are excruciatingly funny. With games of the quality of those I have mentioned in this section now emerging, graphic adventures can be said to have come of age. You won't be surprised to know that a sequel to **The Secret of Monkey Island** is in the offing even as I write.

12

Loose Ends

12.1 Getting help

It's time to draw things to a close, and I want to suggest further ways of getting help should you need them, and list some of the adventure games I personally have enjoyed very much. Most, though not all of these adventures are available on a wide variety of formats; where this is not the case, I will indicate.

12.1.1 Two's company

First, though, where to get help. It may be stating the obvious, but one of the simplest ways of getting help is by playing an adventure with a friend or two: turn it into a collective exercise. Very often two heads really are better than one here, and lively discussion can produce some ingenious ways of approaching a problem. Even if some of these suggestions don't produce results you will still have learned something: negative information has a positive value in that it tells you what doesn't work while you are searching for a way forward.

12.1.2 Help from magazines

Next, try your local newsagent! I don't mean ask him or her directly, but see what computer magazines are on offer. The larger stores will keep quite an extensive stock of computer magazines, and some of them will have sections devoted to games. The larger the games section the more likely it is that the magazine will have space for adventure games. Look first for magazines dedicated to your own computer, but don't forget that there are magazines on the market these days which deal specifically with games.

12.1.3 Reviews

If you find a magazine which you feel is what you want, take out a subscription; it's one way of ensuring a steady supply of reading matter, and you quite often get some special offer as well. When you read reviews of adventure games in a magazine, don't forget two very important things: first, the reviewer is expressing a personal opinion; second, there may well be clues planted in the review – I certainly lard my own reviews with a number of clues to help players get started.

Because reviews are a matter of personal opinion, there will be times when a game is strongly recommended; you might then buy it and think it is awful. There are two things you can do about this: write to the magazine and say why you disagree with the review – if you can do it politely and wittily, you might even find yourself in print. Magazines thrive on reader feedback. The other thing to do is learn by the experience: that particular reviewer's taste in adventures may well be very different from your own. Next time you read a review that is not so favourable, try and see a copy of the game – it might be just the sort of adventure that fills you with delight.

If you can see a copy of an adventure working, this will tell you pretty quickly whether you like it or not. Some software retailers are helpful in this respect, others are more wary, simply because they are fed up with people playing games while they have no real intention of buying them.

12.2 A warning against theft

While I am in schoolmaster mode, I would also add that piracy is not just the wholesale – and illegal – copying of games for resale, it is the unauthorised copying of a single game for passing on to a friend. It is theft and, if it is practised widely enough, it will kill off the whole adventure game market. I am sure that piracy has contributed to the disappearance of a number of software houses, and is a reason why some writers are now reluctant to continue in the adventure game scene. I don't think people realise the time, trouble and costs involved in turning an idea into a well presented and marketed product that will sell widely. Here endeth the lesson!

12.3 A software club

There are a number of clubs that have helped adventure game players from time to time: the trouble is that this scene is somewhat volatile for the simple reason that they tend to be run by enthusiasts rather than professionals. Consequently they can disappear almost overnight if the money or enthusiasm run out.

One exception to this is Special Reserve. This organisation offers a number of solution and hint books for sale and also acts as a mail order source for software and computer peripherals. You pay an annual subscription for membership, but you may well think the service offered is worth it, I certainly do.

Their address is: Special Reserve, P.O.Box 847, Harlow CM21 9PH.

12.4 Writing to a magazine

Lastly, there are the adventure column writers: where a magazine has an adventure gaming section there is nearly always a resident enthusiast who is willing to offer hints, tips and advice and who will also act as a clearing house for readers to exchange information. These writers usually have a pseudonym for good reason: they are freelance writers who just happen to enjoy adventuring, and they often work from home rather than from the editorial office of the magazine in question. They may also write the column in their spare time rather than use it as their main source of income.

Why am I telling you all this? It's simple, really: I want to encourage you in courtesy and patience should you write for help to the adventure columnist of your favourite magazine. There are a number of factors involved in producing any magazine and these all make for delay in contact with readers when anybody other than the editor is concerned.

The editor has to see that the magazine is produced month by month. He or she has to make sure that it continues to contain exciting and interesting material, that it is well written and presented, that the contributors turn in their copy in good time and that readers' letters get read! The letters are then sorted into interest groups and a bunch of letters about adventure games eventually gets parcelled up and posted off to the adventure columnist.

I can't vouch for other adventure column writers, but this is what I do when a parcel of letters is handed to me by the postman. I open it at once. I usually then groan at the number of letters it contains. If it isn't my day off, they then

get put on one side to await my attention. On my day off, I sort them carefully into different categories. First I look for the letters which have enclosed a stamped, self-addressed envelope: these have top priority. I next sort these letters into an order showing when they were received by the office (they are always date-stamped). Then I answer them one by one, beginning with the letters that have the earliest date on them.

Letters which haven't got a stamped, self-addressed envelope are treated somewhat differently. I still sort them, but the reply will become part of my magazine column and so is subject to a number of limitations. First, I have a word allowance – the editor can only accept copy for a column which is within my allowance: the physical size of a magazine page means that there is very little room for flexibility here. I can still remember an incredulous phone call I received in my early days as The Mad Hatter when I let enthusiasm run away with me and I produced copy that was almost twice as long as it should have been.

The next limitation has to do with the time it takes to produce a magazine. The heart of a monthly magazine – the regular features – has to be ready at least a month before the publication date, and most sensible writers try to keep just a little bit ahead of that deadline so that, when a crisis comes up, there is still time to do something. I once lost a whole month's copy due to a corrupt disk just a day before I was due to send it off! Your letter is not, therefore, going to appear in the column for about three months at the best estimate – and that's always supposing it is worth printing.

Lastly, I sort letters into groups which are determined by the particular adventure they are concerned with. Wherever it is possible, I will bunch letters together so that, in any one month, there will be a number of queries and hints about different aspects of a single adventure. When you think about it, this makes sense – and if I happen to have dealt with a particular type of problem or adventure recently, then letters get put to the bottom of the pile to await their turn.

One sort of letter that doesn't get an early or detailed reply – even if a stamped, self-addressed envelope is included – is the one which asks for a complete solution to an adventure game. I do serialise solutions in my magazine column, but I want the game to be at least one or even two years old before I do this. Also, I always leave something crucial out of the solution. This is for a number of reasons, but two are paramount: I don't want to do anything which will damage sales of the game in question, and I don't want to spoil adventure game players' enjoyment by making things look too easy.

Reviewers are often entrusted with full solutions to adventure games, just so that they can see how the whole game is designed, but it would be all to easy

to betray this trust – and that's not the business I am in. That's why the examples from adventure games used in this book only ever deal with a very small portion of the adventure concerned: I want you to see the example as an incentive to buy the game as well as a demonstration how to tackle a particular type of problem or puzzle.

12.4 Recommended adventure games

I'm going to list those games which I think are worth trying to buy, if you haven't got them already. A fairly small number of them will be machine specific (BBC Micro games) but the majority should be of much wider appeal. Some will not be currently on offer by distributors or software houses, but that doesn't mean you should give up hope.

12.4.1 Where to look for older games

These days second-hand and junk shops often have space for computer games, and these places can be very useful sources of supply for adventures that are no longer readily available from normal outlets. Exploration is well worth while here. Also, if you have a small computer dealer near you, make enquiries: if you are nice and polite, and things aren't too busy in the shop, a little bit of chatting up can pay rich dividends. Slow moving stock may well have been shifted to a back room or cupboard – you might well find a treasure trove there. Don't forget also that many computer magazines provide a service whereby readers can advertise items they no longer have a use for – and these can include adventure games; try to make sure what you are getting is an original copy, though.

Lastly – so far as desperation measures are concerned – a phone call or letter to a software house may well produce information as to where remaindered adventure games went or even the fact that they still have a few copies of the very adventure you were hunting for in your own computer's format.

If you don't see the adventure which you consider the finest ever written mentioned in my recommended list, it's probably because I've not seen it. I suppose I ought to offer some kind of a disclaimer: the games I mention are ones that I have either played and enjoyed, or they are games recommended by people whose judgement I am content to accept. Your choice might be quite different: that's what makes adventuring such an entertaining and rewarding pastime.

12.4.2 Games for Acorn computers

So, let's start the list with games that are primarily machine specific – in this case the various Acorn computers – before widening the interest.

A software house that catered exclusively for Acorn computers was Robico: they aimed for the highest standards so far as quality and sophistication were concerned and, like the best producers, were always seeking to improve what they offered. Sadly, at the time of writing, Robico no longer are in the business of producing adventure games; anything you can find, therefore will be specially valuable.

Robert O'Leary's first adventure was **Island of Xaan**: this was a relatively unsophisticated game, so far as the parser was concerned, but showed real promise of what was to come in that it contained around 200 different locations.

THE
HUNT
Search for Shauna

4.2 *AN ADVENTURE WITH GRAPHICS FOR THE BBC MICRO/DISK*
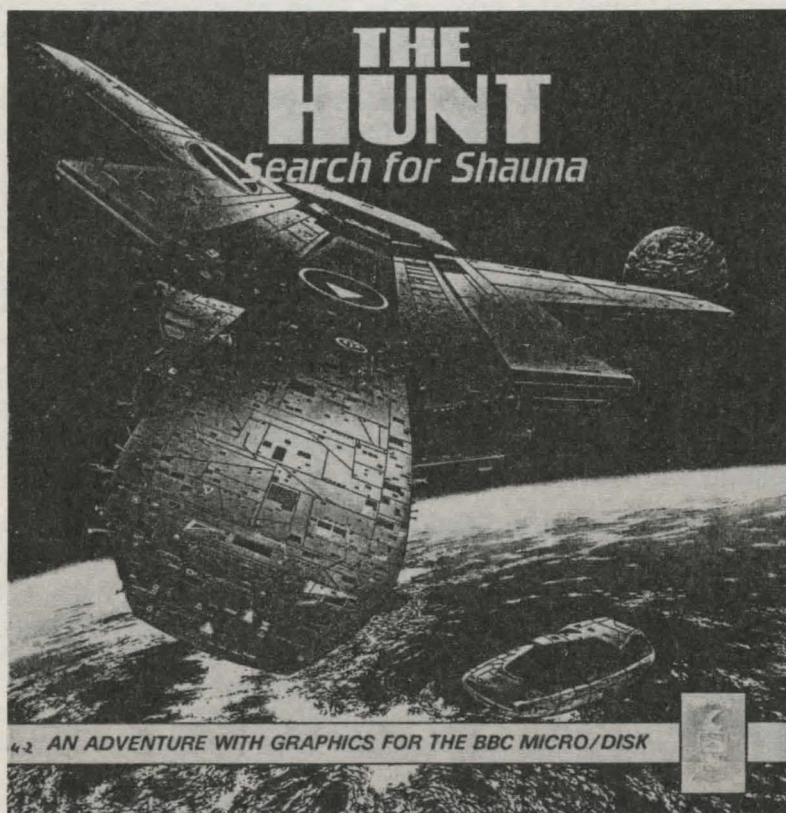
Next followed the three games which featured special agent Rick Hanson. Each of these built upon the strengths of its predecessor as the complexity and sophistication developed. **Rick Hanson, Project Thesius** and **Myorem** were issued between 1986 and 1987 and were then marketed as a compilation entitled **The Rick Hanson Trilogy**. These games are well worth searching for.

The next adventure to appear from Robico was **Enthar Seven**, and this has to rank as one of my all time favourite games. I still play this one for the sheer entertainment it provides – it was a really exciting challenge. This adventure was also released for the Archimedes, and the extra memory provided by this machine allowed for some excellent illustrations to be included.

Just about the last adventure to be produced by Robico was **Blood of the Mutineers**, and again, it was a game which provided me with immense satisfaction as I played my way steadily through it. This program showed what pure text adventures could really provide by way of challenge and entertainment.

Another adventure which was issued under the Robico badge was **The Hunt (Search for Shauna)**. This game was also illustrated, though it came from an outside source: the writer was Ian Muriss. It was a space epic, and the early moves were reminiscent of **Enthar Seven**, though the solution to the initial problem was rather different.

A game which I have already mentioned in some detail, and which ranks as one of the very best text adventures I have ever encountered is **Village of Lost Souls**. It was issued in two guises – and either of them will be well worth seeking out. The initial version was produced by two talented gentlemen, Martin Moore and Glenn McCauley, who called themselves Magus; an expanded version was later released by Robico. If you can ever get hold of Village of Lost Souls you won't regret it.

Martin and Glenn also wrote two other adventures which they described as light relief for serious adventure fans: **What's Eeyore's** and **Locks of Luck**. While still first class adventures, they were characterised by some of the most terrible puns I have ever come across. If your humour extends in that direction – as mine does – then they should be regarded as classics.

Other amusing and entertaining adventures for the BBC Micro include those produced by Melbourne House, which at the time of writing has come under the Virgin Mastertronic label. Games to look out for here are, **Hampstead, Terrormolinos, Dodgy Geezers** and **Dennis Through the Drinking Glass**. As far as I know, they were only ever produced on tape, but each provided interesting challenges and plenty of humour.

Two other writers deserve mention here: Geoff Larsen produced a number of adventure games, first for the Acorn Electron, and then he included the BBC Micro in his repertoire as well. These adventures were developed with the help of the utility program The Quill, were priced at budget levels and acquired a loyal following; among his best were **Hex** and **The Puppet Man**. If you can find any of these tapes, though, you won't be disappointed.

Lastly, where the BBC Micro is concerned, though he may have converted one of his games for the Commodore 64, I must include Colin Jack. He was the author of **Programmer's Revenge** and **Oxbridge**, both of which were issued on tape only. They were highly literate, complex and amusing – and quite

difficult. If you come across either of these adventures while you are a beginner, snap them up and then (rather like a good wine) put them on one side while you mature. Expert adventurers will find them a delight.

12.4.3 Games for various formats

A software house which has specialised in the highest quality text only adventures is Topologika, P.O. Box 39, Stilton, Peterborough, Cambs PE7 3RL. While the writers (such stars as Peter Killworth, Jonathan Partington and Jon Thackray) will be associated in the minds of many with games for Acorn machines, they do in fact address a much wider market including Atari ST, Amiga, Amstrad CPC and PCW, PC and RM Nimbus formats.

Peter Killworth was responsible for – among others – the trilogy comprising **Countdown to Doom**, **Return to Doom** and **Last Days of Doom**. These games all take place on the troubled planet Doomawangara – a place where the unexpected is frequently encountered. They are of substantial size and of medium difficulty: just right for someone who has cut their teeth on a beginner's adventure and who feels ready for something a little more challenging.

Peter was responsible for me getting a very red face: it concerned the very first adventure game he ever wrote, **Philosopher's Quest**. It was an adventure that I rated as difficult, and I received a great many pleas for help from readers of my magazine column. In the end I decided that the sensible thing was to serialise a full solution in the column since, by then, the game was about five years old. I did it just a couple of months before Peter reissued **Philosopher's Quest** on disk! Fortunately it had been revised and expanded and so my solution didn't ruin everything, but I still get a twinge of shame from that episode.

More adventures to look out for on the Topologika label are **Acheton** – by Jon Thackray, David Seal and Jonathan Partington – which is a truly enormous game designed to test and challenge the most expert adventurer. It ranks among my all time favourites. Jonathan Partington was also responsible for **Kingdom of Hamil**, a smaller and not so difficult adventure which many people including myself enjoyed greatly.

Finally, so far as Topologika are concerned, **Avon**, **Monsters of Murdac** and **Hezarin** are all stimulating and exciting challenges; readers should also look out for **SpySnatcher** (previewed in Chapter 11) which was due for release in Autumn 1991; it should now be available. This software house has maintained a consistently high standard of output.

I want to move on now to adventure games which have an even wider hardware base – and we'll begin with Level9. I must have been among their earliest customers, and it is a relationship I have never regretted. Level9 have moved quite recently from adventure games to the challenge of strategy games and so their stock of adventures will steadily diminish. If you don't have the programs mentioned, I suggest you make early enquiries. The address to write to is: Level9 Computing, P.O. Box 39, Weston-super-Mare, Avon BS24 9UR.

Jewels of Darkness was issued under the Level9/Rainbird label and was a compilation of three different adventures which had a common theme. There was **Colossal Adventure**, its sequel **Adventure Quest** and finally **Dungeon Adventure**. All dealt with the mythical Middle Earth and – in the latter two games – the need to defeat the evil Demon Lord. They were marvellous productions, vintage stuff in fact.

Silicon Dreams, from the same label, was a science fiction trilogy comprising **Snowball**, **Return to Eden** and **Worm in Paradise**. Snowball featured a clever programming trick whereby you could explore about 7,000 different locations even if your computer had very limited memory. The other two adventures offered ingenious puzzles and some very clever settings. Again, I can recommend them without reservation.

Snowball
Return to Eden
The Worm in Paradise
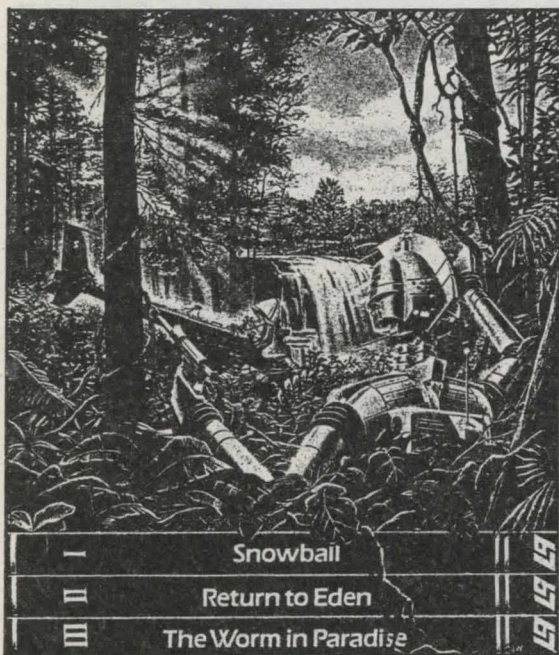
Knight Orc – Level9/Rainbird again – is an adventure I never encountered: the story is simple – the monsters get their revenge on the persecuting humans for a change. Since it comes from such a good background, I am happy to encourage you to look out for it.

Time and Magik was a trilogy issued by Level9 in conjunction with Mandarin Software: it contained the first multi-part adventure I ever encountered, **Lords of Time**. Also included were **Red Moon**, the adventure

which was the indirect cause of my entering the field of computing journalism and its sequel **The Price of Magik**. Each of these adventures was hugely entertaining and should be on the shelves of every enthusiast.

Lancelot was also produced by Level9 and Mandarin and, apart from its intriguing and complex gameplay, it endeavoured to be truly faithful to the Arthurian legend. It also offered a valuable prize to the first person to solve the adventure and deduce the whereabouts of a replica of the Holy Grail from clues planted in the game.

Gnome Ranger and **Ingrid's Back** featured an engaging disaster called Ingrid Bottomlow who seemed capable of laying waste her entire surroundings without even trying. These were hugely entertaining games with some advanced features.

Scapeghost was the last adventure to be produced by the Level9 team before they turned their attention to strategy games. A murdered detective had to trace his killers and arrange for them to be arrested in such a way that he could also free his colleague who was being held hostage by drug dealing criminals. It's an adventure I enjoyed very much.

I saw my first Magnetic Scrolls adventure when I was asked to review one issued on the Archimedes format – and I was immediately captivated. Fairly compact in terms of the number of locations they offer they nevertheless turn out to be very extensive adventures providing a real challenge. Good, articulate text accompanies graphics of a superb quality in a way that will delight any adventurer.

The Magnetic Scrolls adventures that I have seen and enjoyed are **Jinxter**, **Corruption**, **Fish!**, **The Guild of Thieves** and (one only available to members of Official Secrets) **Myth** – a smaller adventure than the others, but just as entertaining. Where there are illustrations they are of the highest quality, the text is highly literate and the humour is dry as a bone. I have enjoyed these games hugely. At the time of writing these games are still available in a variety of formats from Official Secrets/Special Reserve.

Recently Magnetic Scrolls came under the Virgin Mastertronic label, and it was from there that the latest blockbuster, **Wonderland**, was issued. The more I play this adventure, the more entranced I become. It is with great reluctance that I have halted my progress through this adventure in order to complete this chapter. It is one of those rare pieces of software which really does live up to all the advance publicity. If you have a computer capable of running this adventure, you really should make acquiring it a top priority.

I have already described **Iron Lord** in some detail – and simply want to say that I recommend it most highly indeed. From the French software house UbiSoft, it is handled in this country by Cygnus Software.

Another source of adventures which appeal to many and which consistently receive favourable reviews is Sierra: I have mentioned **Gold Rush**, which is a well packaged, well researched and entertaining adventure, but Sierra are probably much better known for the following series of adventure games which are still well worth adding to your collection if you have a computer capable of running them.

The **Kings Quest** series has five episodes that I know of; **Leisure Suit Larry** has gone three rounds with the opposition in pursuit of love; **Police Quest** has two stories to investigate and the different **Space Quest** adventures number at least four. All of these offer excellent entertainment value if the setting appeals to you, and there are probably a number of other games from the

Leisure Suit Larry

Sierra stable that I have not come across.
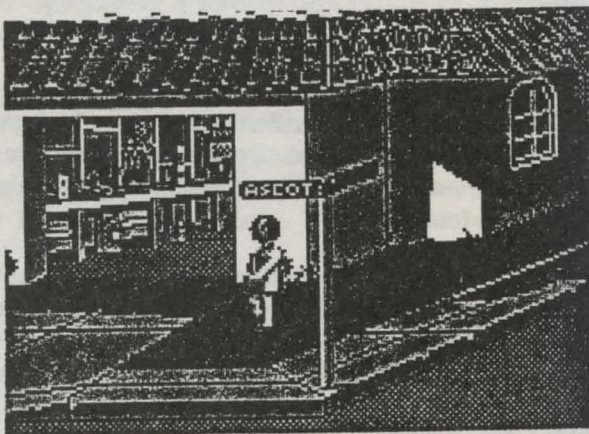
Infocom is another well known name in the adventure world – and I have referred to the different games in the **Zork** trilogy as classics from the early adventuring scene. Again, they ought to form part of any adventure game player's collection. In some cases, they can be obtained at a budget price which makes them an even more attractive offer. There is also an adventure entitled **Beyond Zork** which I haven't yet seen.

Infocom also released **Leather Goddesses of Phobos**, which they describe as a racy space-age spoof: this game can be played in lewd mode providing you are prepared to give your age as 21! Some of the descriptive passages then are slightly steamy.

Two games from the Mindscape stable that I have enjoyed are **Uninvited** and **Shadowgate**. Both are full graphic adventures: **Shadowgate** is in the heroic fantasy mould where, as the last of an ancient line of kings, you have to defeat the evil machinations of the Warlock Lord.

Uninvited gives you a taste of gothic horror, and I mean it when I say looks can kill! If you open the wrong doors, you die very nastily. Other adventures in the horror mould come from the aptly named firm Horrorsoft. One that

has particular appeal to me is **Personal Nightmare** – you play the part of a vicar's son as you seek to unravel the mystery surrounding the village. Another program from the same stable which I enjoyed looking at was **Elvira – Mistress of the Dark**.

From this fairly selective list you can see what a wide variety of tastes are catered for these days where adventure games are concerned. I've given you the tools for tackling them – now go on to complete the job.

Leather Goddesses of Phobos

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Help for beginners and experts!

This book will be of great interest to all those who love to play adventure games. Whatever computer you use – PC, ST, Amiga, BBC, Archimedes, Amstrad or Commodore 64 – you'll get far more enjoyment from your leisure time in the company of Bob Redrup. He tells you all you need to know about:

☞ History, development of computer adventure games;

☞ Tackling first moves

☞ Mass and mapping techniques

☞ Mazes and how to master them

☞ Solving puzzles - detailed examples

☞ Choosing adventure games

About Bob Redrup...

Bob is a Church of England vicar in a busy Cornish parish and is a long-established games enthusiast. Writing as the "Mad Hatter" in *The Micro User*, he is already well-known for his regular articles on computer games.

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